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FORMULA 1 2025

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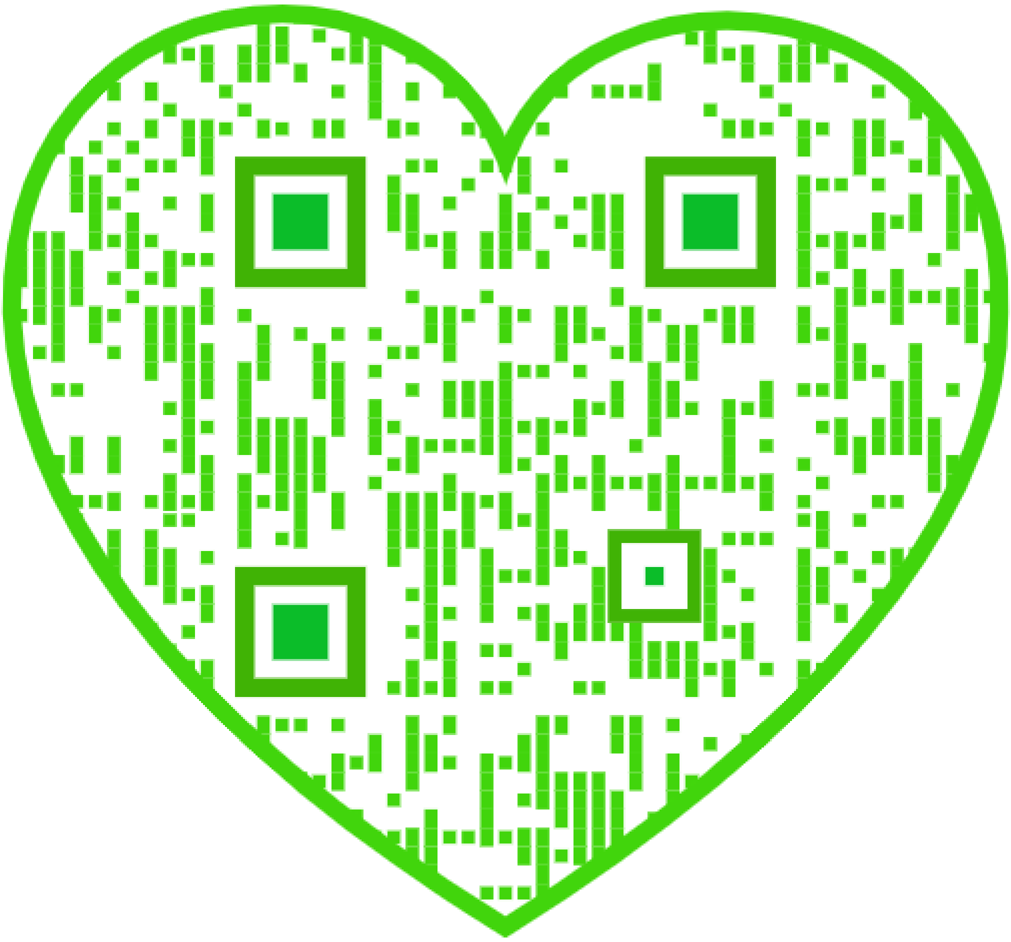
APRIL 2025



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COVER IMAGES:

MERCEDES
FERRARI
RED BULL
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F1 2025 GUIDE

McLaren looks strong in a tale of the unexpected

A Williams set the fastest time in pre-season testing amid a series of bizarre events in Bahrain, but a crunching of the data suggests that the team from Woking starts 2025 as favourite

F1 2025 GUIDE

HAMILTON VS LECLERC

Hamilton joins Leclerc's red army

Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc would be Formula 1's most tantalising driver match-up even if they weren't partnered at Ferrari, a team that comes freighted with its own historic expectations and internal politics...

Kevin Magnussen

MAGNUSSEN FINALLY FULFILS HIS DESTINY

A new lease of life in sportscar racing was delayed by a surprise F1 return. Now Kevin Magnussen is ready for an adventure that was always calling him

GARY WATKINS

FORMULA 1

12 Pit + Paddock
16 Opinion: Ben Hunt
19 Opinion: Oleg Karpov
20 Opinion: Pat Symonds

F1 PREVIEW

22 All the 2025 cars
24 Bahrain test analysis
32 F1 2025 tech battlegrounds
36 Big interview: Carlos Sainz
42 Hamilton vs Leclerc
49 Team by team guide
71 Calendar and essential info

72 Now that was a rivalry: 159 vs 375
82 Alternative view
84 Great debate

SINGLE SEATERS

88 Pit + Paddock
93 Opinion: Stephen Lickorish
94 Susie Wolff on F1 Academy

SPORTSCARS

102 Qatar WEC debrief
104 Pit + Paddock
107 Opinion: Gary Watkins
108 Magnussen's sportscar destiny

RALLYING

115 Special Stage
117 Opinion: Tom Howard
118 Meet the WRC's next female star

TOURING CARS

124 Pit + Paddock
127 Opinion: Marcus Simmons
128 Thompson's BTCC battles

NATIONAL

134 Pit + Paddock
139 Opinion: Marcus Pye
140 What we're looking forward to
146 Star club car: Vauxhall Viva V8

FINISHING STRAIGHT

148 What's on
156 Gear up: product reviews
158 From the archive: 1974 British GP
160 Autosport 75: 1969 Monaco GP
161 Next month: F1 battle begins

IGNITION

Will Lando Norris and McLaren lead the way as the F1 pack kicks its season off in Australia?

MAUGER/GETTY IMAGES

McLaren in pole position but F1 2025 promises much

Anticipation for the 2025 Formula 1 campaign has been building since it became clear in the second half of last season that the hitherto dominant Red Bull team was beatable – by McLaren, Ferrari and Mercedes. Or perhaps even earlier, when Lewis Hamilton's move to Ferrari was confirmed at the start of 2024.

Now we've had some on-track action that indicates those storylines do indeed have plenty of mileage. As Alex Kalinauckas shows in our in-depth Bahrain testing analysis on page 24, McLaren probably does have a small advantage, but Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari aren't far behind, which is encouraging as teams head to Melbourne for the season-opening Australian Grand Prix this week. As in many close championship battles, the results could well be dictated by individual track characteristics, in-season development and nailing the details on the day. Could we have the first non-Red Bull/Mercedes champion since Jenson Button in 2009 (or Hamilton in 2008, if we regard Brawn as the embryonic Mercedes operation)?

While there are hopes that F1 will at least match the seven different winners it had in 2024, there are other stories to look out for. Carlos Sainz topped the testing times in his new Williams and, though it would be delusional to suggest he will be a consistent frontrunner in 2025, the confidence emanating from the Spaniard is clear in this month's interview (p36). And how his replacement will get on at Ferrari is the focus of Roberto Chinchero's piece on Hamilton versus Charles Leclerc (p42).

We also have our traditional technical overview from Jake Boxall-Legge, who looks at the likely key design battlegrounds in the final year of the current regulations (p32), plus a team-by-team guide courtesy of Stuart Codling (p49).

The story of Ferrari's F1 breakthrough, as its 375 defeated the 159 of Enzo's former employer Alfa Romeo, is the subject of 'Now that was a rivalry' (p72), while our team of F1 journalists round out a look to the season ahead by picking who they think will be the 2025 world champion (p84). Make a note of the answers and see how wrong they are in nine months' time...

The rising hopefuls in the F2 pack will also get their seasons going in Australia. Stephen Lickorish talks to Alex Dunne to find out why the Irishman is expecting to have a much better season in F2 than he did in F3, plus hears from a team boss who has worked with both Lando Norris and Red Bull's F2 talent Arvid Lindblad (p93).

The search for the next female stars of motorsport continues, both on track and on the rally stage. Susie Wolff talks to Rebecca Clancy about the development and future of the F1 Academy (p94) in our Single Seaters section, while Tom Howard introduces Claire Schonborn – the inaugural winner of the World Rally Championship's Beyond Rally Women's Driver Development Programme (p118).

Like the WRC, the World Endurance Championship has already got under way, with a 10-hour thrash in Qatar. Gary Watkins was there and he explains how Ferrari took a dominant 1-2-3 in our debrief on p102, as well as hearing from a chatty Kevin Magnussen about the Dane's switch from F1 to BMW's Hypercar programme (p108).

While BMW's loss of four-time champion Colin Turkington is a blow to British Touring Car fans (p127), the pain is mitigated a little by the news of triple title winner Gordon Shedden's return with Toyota, which leads our Touring Car section. Marcus Simmons also catches up with another tin-top talent, James Thompson, two decades on from Thommo's fierce BTCC duels with Yvan Muller (p128). Our BTCC preview will appear in next month's issue, out on 10 April.

The UK racing season is now upon us and we pick out the things we're looking forward to most in 2025, ranging from British GT and GB3 contests to historic extravaganzas and celebrations, in our 15-page National section, which starts on p132.

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor
kevin.turner@autosport.com

GRAND PRIX GUIDE

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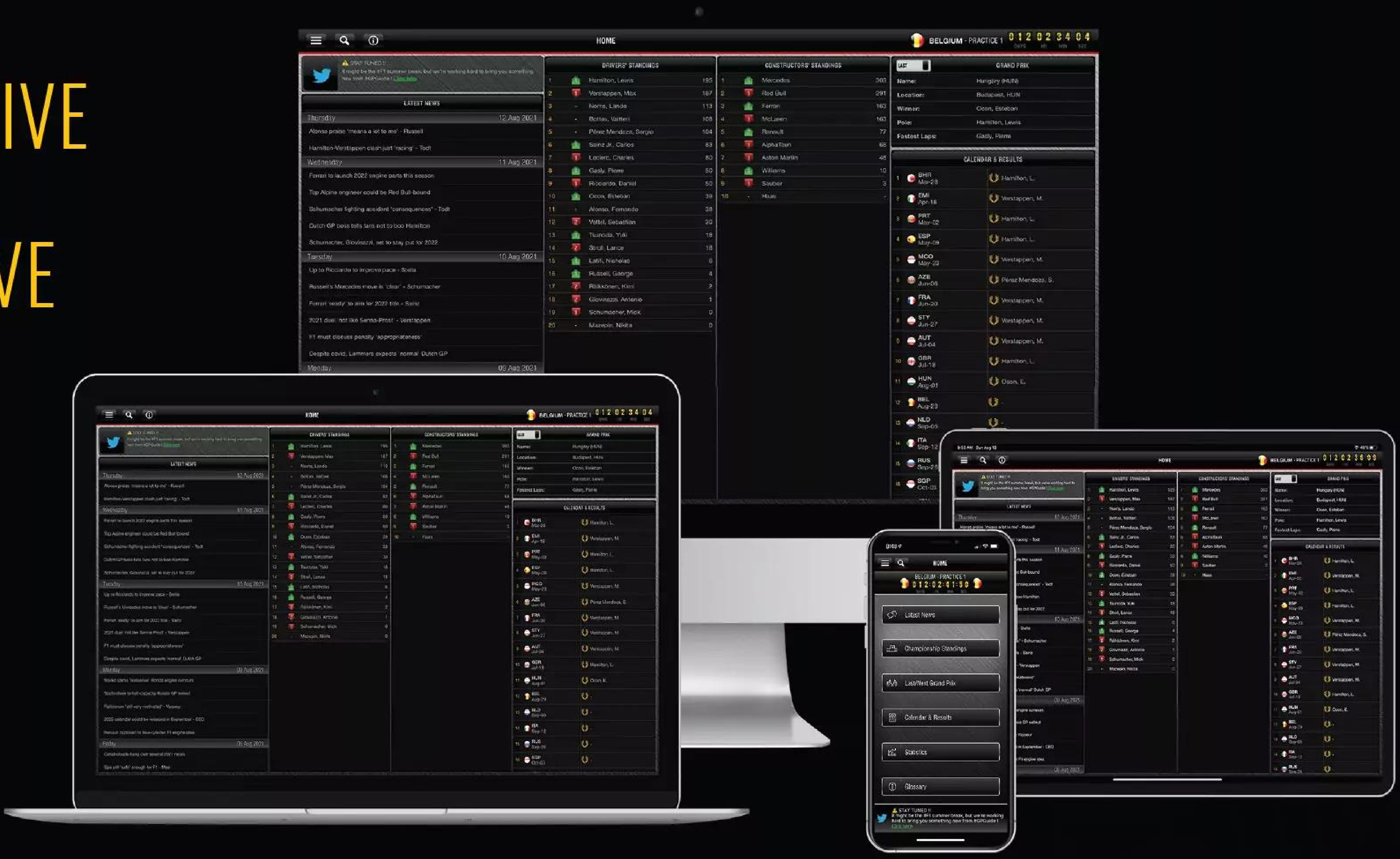

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FORMULA ONE LICENSING BV OWNS THE FORMULA ONE TRADEMARKS

Class of 2025 assemble

The life of a Formula 1 driver? This is what it's all about… The class of 2025 look suitably enthusiastic as they prepare to assume their positions for the official start-of-term snap ahead of pre-season testing in Bahrain. Fernando Alonso, taking the weight off as he chats to Lando Norris, appears particularly thrilled by the occasion ahead of what will be his 22nd full season racing in F1. The specially built set and carefully choreographed poses are a far cry from the traditional school photo set-up on a start/finish line that used to be considered sufficient for such occasions. This is F1 in 2025.

Photographer Sam Bagnall/ Getty Images

Where Sakhir, Bahrain
When Wednesday 26 February 2025

Details Nikon Z9,
70-200mm lens, 1/100th @ F9

View through the fence

Lewis Hamilton peers through a tangle of aero rakes on the opening day of his first official pre-season test as a Ferrari driver. Time is short before the Australian GP, so Ferrari has a detailed agenda to work through with Hamilton, Charles Leclerc and the new SF-25, and such devices are part of the process of measuring reality compared to the theory created in CFD and windtunnels. The annoyance of the season's first red flag interruption because of a circuit power outage briefly throws carefully laid plans out of kilter. But such is life within the hard-working teams. Little in F1 ever keeps to the script.

Photographer Clive Mason/
Getty Images

Where Sakhir, Bahrain
When Wednesday 26 February 2025

Details Nikon Z9
400mm lens, 1/1000th @ F9

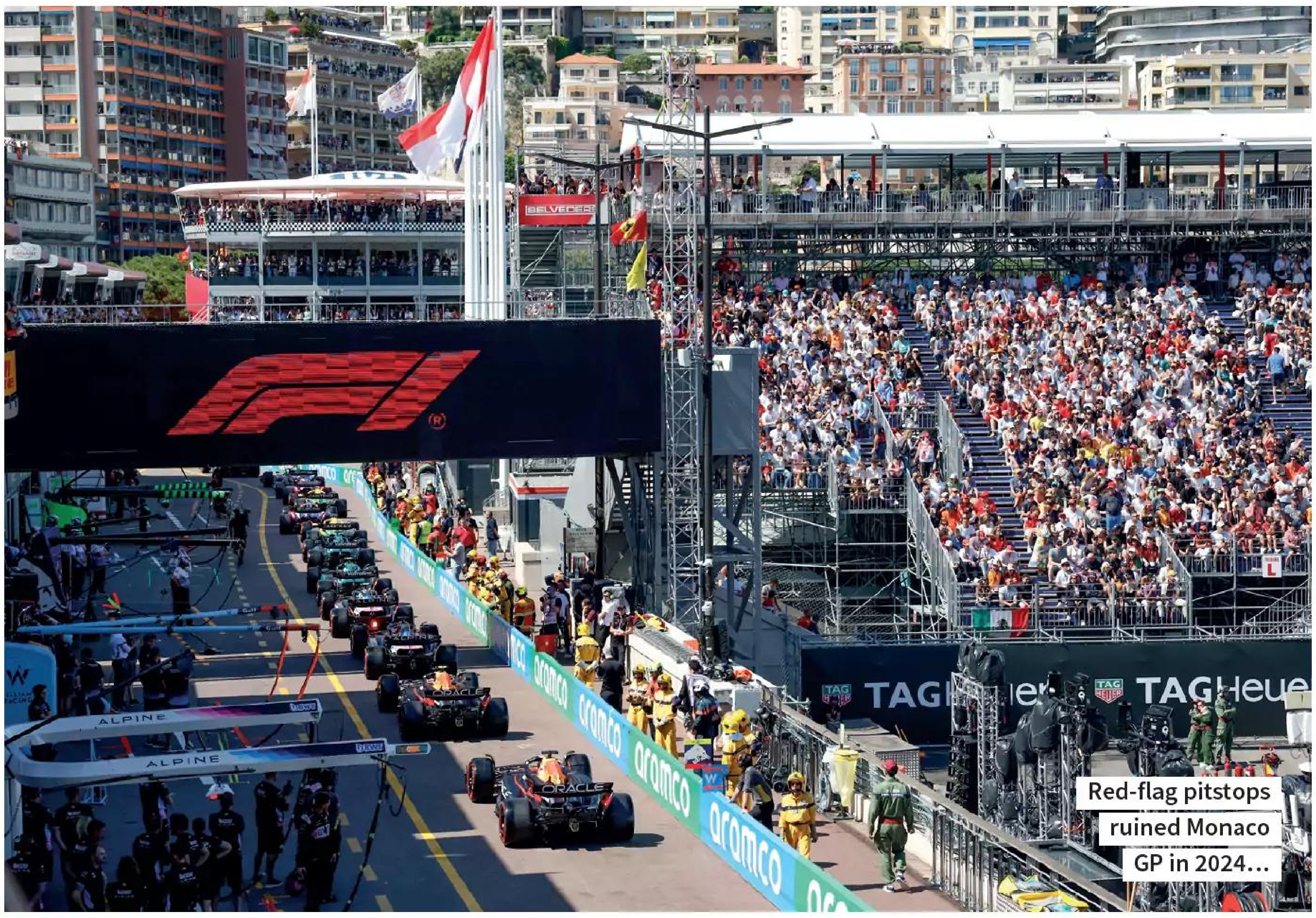
Let's go to work

Newbie Isack Hadjar gets a taste of what it's like to be at the heart of an F1 pitstop as the Racing Bulls crew descend on his VCARB 02 on the opening day of the Bahrain test. Hadjar runs in the morning before handing over to Yuki Tsunoda in the afternoon. The team reports a "solid start" to life with the new car, both drivers shaking off cold and windy conditions to complete more than 400km each. Hadjar ends up 11th fastest for the day, just a tenth off Tsunoda's best. He's had "fun" in his first session in one of F1's hot seats.

Photographer Clive Rose/
Getty Images

Where Sakhir, Bahrain
When Wednesday 26 February 2025

Details Canon EOS R1
RF100-300mm lens, 1/800th @ F2.8



Red-flag pitstops ruined Monaco GP in 2024...

DUNBAR/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 1

TWO-STOP MINIMUM FOR MONACO

The Monaco Grand Prix will feature a minimum of two pitstops for each driver, after the FIA World Motor Sport Council introduced a brand new rule exclusive to the race in a bid to inject some unpredictability to a notoriously processional event.

The additional stops were first mooted at the latest F1 Commission meeting, and the rule stands regardless of weather conditions.

"The FIA World Motor Sport Council reviewed a proposal regarding the implementation of a mandatory two-stop strategy (in both wet and dry conditions) for the Monaco GP, with the primary intent of improving the sporting spectacle of this race given the notable difficulty in overtaking at this circuit," a statement read.

"Following recent discussions in the F1 Commission, a specific requirement for the Monaco GP has been approved mandating the use of at least three sets of tyres in the race, with a minimum of two different tyre compounds to be used if it's a dry race."

F1 has struggled to provide entertainment around the streets of Monte Carlo, largely down to the width of the current cars, while one-stop strategies are common approaches given the power of track position. The situation reached a head last year when an early red flag allowed drivers to switch tyre compounds before the restart, with only six drivers later visiting the pitlane under race conditions.

Other topics covered by the Commission meeting included ratifying additional wing flex tests; more stringent rear wing tests will begin from the start of the 2025 season, while the same will also be applied to the front wing tests from late May at the Spanish Grand Prix. Restrictions on the number of gearboxes have now been deleted; the FIA is satisfied that reliability of the components is such that it no longer requires monitoring.

Furthermore, the driver cooling system parameters have now been defined and are set to be included within the 2025 regulations for races where a 'heat hazard' is declared. The new wearable-tech shirts designed to keep drivers cool will be optional this year before becoming mandatory from 2026.

MARK MANN-BRYANS & JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

...and return to 1965 dimensions for F1 cars won't happen

GETTY IMAGES

Imola 2005: a V10 classic

TEE/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 1

FIA chief eyes V10 return

FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem has suggested that Formula 1 should be open to a switch back to V10 engines, running on sustainable fuels. F1 is adopting fully synthetic fuel from next year as part of its change in engine formula, which will feature a near-50/50 split between output from the V6 internal combustion engine and a more powerful MGU-K electric motor, increasing the reliance on electric energy.

As part of its goals to achieve a net-zero carbon footprint by 2030, F1's switch to sustainable fuels should reduce carbon emissions from its on-track product – and in light of that, many would like to see F1 return to screaming V10 engines, last used by the entire grid in 2005. Ben Sulayem believes it should be looked into when the governing body and its stakeholders define F1's next engine formula, earmarked for 2030.

"We should consider a range of directions including the roaring sound of the V10 running on sustainable fuel," Ben Sulayem wrote on social media. "Whichever direction is chosen, we must support the teams and manufacturers in ensuring cost control on R&D expenditure."

Red Bull boss Christian Horner added: "The purist in me would love to go back to a V10 done responsibly, with sustainable fuel."

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MAUGER/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Hands up who wants a return to launches in pitlane at Silverstone

FORMULA 1

Boos mar F1 launch

Red Bull team boss Christian Horner, his star driver Max Verstappen and the FIA were subjected to booing from some sections of the crowd in attendance at F1's 75 Live event at the O2 Arena in London, which the governing body felt was a "tribalist" reaction from the mostly British crowd in attendance. The boos towards the FIA, presumably due to president Mohammed Ben Sulayem's divisive leadership, emerged when the organisation's logo was shown during the launch. Horner and Verstappen then received their own boos during Red Bull's launch of its 2025 livery.

"Great rivalries throughout the history of motorsport have contributed to making it such an exciting experience for fans," an FIA spokesperson said. "But what underpins sport at all levels is a culture of respect. As such, it was disappointing to hear the crowd's tribalist reaction to Max Verstappen and Christian Horner at the F1 launch in London. Max and Christian have both contributed greatly to the sport we love. In the season ahead we should not lose sight of that."

Horner professed to have no problem with his own reception, but admitted disappointment that Verstappen was subjected to similar treatment when his image was shown on the arena's screens.

"Launching your car is a bit like launching your home strip in an away fan stadium and so fans will always back the teams and drivers that they want to," said Horner, using a football analogy. "And of course, we've been the protagonists over the years.

"I guess the only disappointment I had with it was that the reception to Max as a four-time world champion, that was disappointing, but passion in sport is always going to be there. If the launch would have been in Holland, no doubt the reception would have been somewhat different."

Verstappen's father, ex-F1 driver Jos, felt that the reception his son received was "unacceptable" and reckoned that the reigning champion would boycott similar events if they were to be held in the UK in future. "Max has no desire to be booed by 25,000 people," Verstappen Sr told YouTube channel Racexpress. "He also says, 'If it's in England again next year, you certainly won't see me there'."

MARK MANN-BRYANS & BEN HUNT

MANSELL HANDLES CORNERS BETTER THAN MARADONA

'Twas ever thus: Mansellmania back in the day

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

TEE/GETTY IMAGES

McLAREN TIES DOWN ITS AERO WIZARD

McLaren aero chief Peter Prodromou will stay at the Woking squad on a long-term deal after team principal Andrea Stella sought to tie down the key players in its 2024 constructors' triumph. The Anglo-Cypriot air whisperer was a long-time colleague of Adrian Newey at McLaren and Red Bull, before rejoining McLaren in 2014 as chief engineer. His return to the aero department coincided with the team's recent revival.

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ROMNEY/GETTY IMAGES

ZHOU BACK IN FOLD AS FERRARI RESERVE

Ex-Sauber driver Zhou Guanyu is rejoining Ferrari to add to its reserve driver pool alongside Antonio Giovinazzi.

Zhou became the first Chinese to start a grand prix, before his three-year stint with Sauber came to an end at the close of 2024. He was formerly part of the Ferrari Driver Academy, before switching to Alpine's programme in 2019.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE & FRANKIE MAO

Mario reckons it's time to take risks

MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 1

ANDRETTI SAYS TEAM WILL BE READY FOR 2026

Cadillac board director Mario Andretti says that F1's planned 11th team will be ready for its 2026 entry into the series, although concedes it will have to take some risks to take its place on the grid.

The Andretti effort to enter Formula 1 finally succeeded after a protracted saga – and struggle between the FIA and FOM – when the team secured a deal with F1 around last November's Las Vegas Grand Prix weekend. That followed Michael Andretti stepping back from the team, now rebranded Cadillac with full works backing from General Motors and new headquarters in Silverstone. The team is now owned by TWG Global, a group owned by financial services entrepreneur Mark Walter and run by CEO Dan Towriss, who will oversee its fortunes.

Despite having its initial entry bid denied by FOM, the squad continued to develop for months at its Silverstone base under former Manor team boss Graeme Lowdon, going on a hiring spree that included former F1 tech chief and engineering consultant Pat Symonds. It has also been running 2026 car models at Toyota's wind tunnel in Cologne.

Team director Mario Andretti vowed that the team will be ready to start the 2026 season on a respectable level. "Everyone knows what the responsibility is and there's no question about it," said the revered 85-year-old 1978 F1 world champion.

"This has been in the planning all along. As you can see, while things were still not official, we just put the faith in the system that somebody would reward us for all the work and good intentions that had already gone in.

"In any business you have to really believe in what you're doing. It's going to take risks, and many risks were taken already by everyone here hoping that reason would ultimately prevail, and it did. But that's what makes things that much sweeter."

Cadillac will use Ferrari engines until its own design is fit for purpose, believed to be earmarked for 2028. Andretti added that IndyCar star Colton Herta would be "a great candidate" for an F1 drive, with the team seeking to pair an American driver with an experienced figure in the other car.

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Andretti Global star Herta is in the frame for a seat

FARMER/GETTY IMAGES

African GP retro: this is Tripoli 1939

GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA 1

CONGO CHIEFS WARN F1 ON RWANDA PLAN

Representatives of the Democratic Republic of Congo have called upon Formula 1 to deny neighbouring country Rwanda a grand prix in the wake of long-running troubles in the region.

Since 2022, the DRC has been embroiled in a bloody conflict with the M23 movement, a military rebel group backed by the Rwandan army, which has taken over swathes of territory in the North Kivu province that borders Rwanda.

Against the backdrop of new clashes around key city Goma, which the United Nations reports has left 2900 dead, DRC's Minister of Foreign Affairs Therese Kayikwamba Wagner has urged F1 chief Stefano Domenicali not to entertain talks with Rwanda over a grand prix in the country.

"I write to express deep concern over Formula 1's reported ongoing talks with Rwanda to host a grand prix in its capital Kigali," Wagner wrote in the letter. "Rwanda is currently occupying a large part of the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo in collaboration with its proxy the M23, displacing over 700,000 Congolese citizens.

"While I applaud Formula 1's desire to host a grand prix in Africa, I question whether Rwanda would be a choice that best represents our continent and urge you to end negotiations and rule Rwanda out as a potential host."

FILIP CLEEREN

RICHARD PARDON FOR MERCEDES-BENZ GRAND PRIX LTD

F1 BUSINESS

ADIDAS DEAL TO BOOST MERCEDES

Mercedes had been keen to work with adidas for some time, and finally a 15-year flirtation has resulted in the union of the two German companies ahead of the 2025 Formula 1 season.

Alongside the eye-catching fan apparel and the familiar three stripes adorning team gear, there is ongoing technical development that adidas hopes will mean Mercedes improves its productivity.

Mercedes CCO Richard Sanders was a key figure in adidas coming on board and revealed that the collaboration is aimed at taking the eight-time constructors' champion team back to the top.

"Financially, positioning-wise and brand-wise, all three of those things makes this huge for us," he said. "We wanted to do things slightly differently and for the first time in F1 we've split the clothing functionally. Our management, we all sit wearing shirts and chinos, which is perfectly fine. But the mechanics used to wear almost the identical clothing and they're changing tyres, working on the car, changing suspension. It just made no sense."

The process of considering the individual requirements of team members is something that has been a target for Mercedes for some time. "The mechanics will wear apparel which is optimised for sporting performance and is better for them functionally," explains Sanders. "We've been working towards this new concept, not necessarily with adidas, for about three years. So I'm hoping it will be very difficult for Red Bull, McLaren or Ferrari to copy us. We have a competitive moat built around our concept, which is ideal."

Feedback from the team on the ground in Bahrain for pre-season testing will be reported back to adidas HQ and updates rolled out throughout the season, with drivers George Russell and Andrea Kimi Antonelli also set to benefit.

"In Miami, there'll be a big update where you will see a different side to Mercedes hopefully coming through," said Sanders. "Also, adidas has taken a look at the drivers, particularly trying to keep them cool. It's a big topic – the FIA are looking to address it at hot races, but the FIA will address it in the cockpit.

"But adidas has actually addressed it outside of the cockpit and as the drivers get into the cockpit. I don't want to say too much, but they should have a slightly lower body temperature, which should help them, theoretically, in the race."

For adidas, the partnership with Mercedes comes at a good time, after losing its deal with the German Football Association to Nike. Mercedes will be positioned as part of the adidas football division, which includes clubs such as Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Manchester United.

"It's a nine-figure sum projected global sales in year one and that would put us within adidas's top three licensees," adds Sanders, who will no doubt don his adidas shirt and chinos for the season-opener in Australia.

MARK MANN-BRYANS

MERCEDES

New team gear for Sanders and chums (top)

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

STEINER DROPS CASE

Guenther Steiner has dropped his lawsuit against the Haas Formula 1 squad after the former team principal came to an agreement during mediation proceedings. He initially sued Haas Formula, LLC in April of last year for what he claimed was money owed to him after his contract with the team was not renewed.

MONACO SPONSOR

TAG Heuer has become the first title sponsor in the history of the Monaco Grand Prix. The luxury watchmaker has also been announced as an official partner and timekeeper of the all-female F1 Academy, as well as designing one of the new partner liveries.

NETFLIX F1 RIGHTS?

Netflix is emerging as the potential new home for Formula 1 in the US, with a bidding process for the live broadcast rights from the 2026 season onwards due to begin. Meanwhile, Netflix's seventh series of the *Drive to Survive* documentary series began airing from 7 March.

THE BUSINESS FORMULA

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ROSE/GETTYIMAGES

Verstappen and Norris in fine form, joshing about pub-fight showdown

INSIDER

There are real signs that F1 2025 will be a classic, argues Ben Hunt

There was something most unusual about pre-season testing in Bahrain. In fact, it rarely happens at all in Formula 1; probably not since the 2020 Tuscan Grand Prix, which was the first F1 race to welcome spectators back into the grandstands after the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a wave of positivity and smiling faces in the paddock, despite the unusually cold weather.

Normally, these long days spawn conversations about missing the time spent at home during the winter, or even lamenting how short the break was. Key figures hidden away in the back of garages out of everyone's way. But not this year. There is an overwhelming sense of optimism among the team bosses, owners and drivers.

So why is there such a positive vibe coming into 2025? Could it be that one of the side-effects of the F1 75 event in London's O2 Arena was that it knocked off some of that winter rust? That the flagship event celebrating the sport's rich heritage actually refocused the mind on what an incredible championship it is? For those at the event, it proved successful and was universally well-received by the ticket holders, although it is appreciated that this was not necessarily the case for the viewers tuning in at home.

Booing aside, F1 75 has been widely considered to be a hit, especially on social media, although that has yet to be equated into monetary value. However, for the time being at least, F1 says it has no plans to repeat the livery launch next year in another venue, which is a shame.

Another element may well be the fact that the season kicks off at a decent track. Melbourne's Albert Park is a proper motorsport venue with a passionate crowd.

There is no denying that having the Australian GP as the opening race of the season is a popular choice in the paddock. The race down under is a logistical headache and places extra strain on the factories to rush through the parts that have been in development in time to fly them to Oz. But there is something about the vibrancy of Melbourne and the fans that brings the event to life.

The other factor to consider was the bullet-proof reliability over the three days in Bahrain. The full details will be covered within these pages (see page 24) but, when you see that Red Bull completed the fewest laps of any of the 10 teams, the picture is that these 2025 challengers are reliable. The breakdowns we have seen in previous testing sessions that have cost teams hours of valuable track time were not a thing in Bahrain, and that all bodes well.

So too does the healthy mix of different teams setting the pace at the top of the timing screens. As is often said, lap times don't really matter too much during testing, as fuel loads remain unknown – only they do when it comes to providing a boost in morale. Just look at Carlos Sainz, who was all smiles when he topped the test in his Williams.

As for the drivers themselves, there appears to be a willingness to allow Lewis Hamilton to shoulder all the publicity following his outing in this year's Ferrari SF-25. Charles Leclerc said as much in his press conference; he has spent time in the shadows over the winter, which has allowed him to hone his preparations coming into the season.

> *"There is an overwhelming sense of optimism among the team bosses, owners and drivers"*

Then there was Max Verstappen's performance in his press conference. He was sat next to Lando Norris, the man who had offered the only threat to his fourth world title. The two joked about their falling-out last season in Austria and Mexico, insisting they had a pub fight to resolve it. It was all rather knockabout fun, which gives the impression that both are pleased with the outcome of their respective teams' development over the winter.

Above all, there was an overriding sense that this season is going to be remarkably competitive and the most evenly matched in years, and that has given everyone a lift.

Strap yourself in because, if testing is anything to go by, this is going to be a belting season that leaves us all with smiles on our faces.

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INSIDER

Don't patronise rookies, just accept that they're good, says Oleg Karpov

Six rookies on the grid! Well, three in fact, because only Andrea Kimi Antonelli, Isack Hadjar and Gabriel Bortoleto haven't raced in Formula 1 before the new season starts in Melbourne. Or four, if you go by the sporting regulations, because Jack Doohan hasn't taken part in "more than two championship races" yet, which means that the rules still grant him the rights and privileges of a rookie driver.

It would be an exaggeration to say that all them owed their F1 debuts to Ollie Bearman, but his contribution shouldn't be underestimated either. It was his Ferrari cameo last March in Jeddah that left such a lasting impression on the paddock: called up just hours before FP3, the then-18-year-old Briton narrowly missed out on Q3 and finished seventh in the race on one of the most challenging circuits on the calendar. Half a year prior to that, Liam Lawson was thrown into the deep end with AlphaTauri after Daniel Ricciardo's practice crash at Zandvoort and managed to swim (almost literally), before scoring his first points a few weeks later in Singapore in one of F1's most physically demanding races. And let's not forget Franco Colapinto and his impressive debut with Williams.

But while recognising that these three have made good use of their opportunities, is this also the point at which we should stop acting so surprised when a rookie driver performs well in F1? Is it time to accept that this new generation of drivers doesn't need thousands of miles behind the wheel of an F1 car to get up to speed quickly? Maybe from now on, we can just take it as a fact: these youngsters are all bloody good – and there's absolutely nothing special about their ability to adapt quickly.

A rookie today is different from a rookie decades ago. They are now real racing natives, and not just because they start driving karts shortly after learning to walk. They have their simulators set up next to their beds, so they can literally spend days competing online. And while it's not quite the same as competing on a real track, these guys are all 'Verstappens' in the sense that they live and breathe racing every day.

There's a case to be made for a comparison with the world of chess. Computers have completely transformed that game. It's now generally accepted that a human can no longer beat the most sophisticated chess engines – and this has changed not only chess theory (what was once considered brilliance is often dismissed now as a blunder by a cold-blooded machine), but also the entire world of competitive chess. Learning and progressing with a computer makes a huge difference to those who start their journey with one, because you no longer need tons of boring books to study openings and find puzzles – there are millions of them in any chess app. You don't need a coach to tell you which move was bad and why. All games are analysed by computers within seconds.

And this new breed of chess kids is frightening as hell! The new classical chess world champion is 18 years old. The whole chess world is in awe of clips from the streams of 11-year-old Argentinian Faustino Oro, who beats the world's absolute top players online and then dances in his chair. The 'Messi of Chess' (of course, they already call him that!) reached a rating of 2300 at the age of nine. For those wondering, that's roughly the equivalent of earning enough points for a practice superlicence.

Racing isn't quite there yet. And perhaps it never will be, as those hilarious internet videos of AI-controlled racing cars crashing into walls suggest. Yet there's hardly any other sport where the virtual equivalent is so close to reality. In racing, the gap between the digital world and the real world is still greater than in chess. You may not like what your opponent across the board looks like or smells like, and that might somehow affect your performance – but it's still not quite the same as dealing with g-forces behind the wheel of a real car. Some of the boundaries between virtual racing and reality may never be completely erased, but they are already incredibly thin.

> ***"These guys are all 'Verstappens' in the sense that they live and breathe racing every day"***

For a lot of young drivers, racing isn't just a job or a passion; it's their whole life. They start competing long before they are in their teens, and they spend hours every day racing online. And it's not just that – the most talented drivers are trained by academy tutors and start working with F1 engineers on actual teams' simulators long before they get the chance to get into a real car. There may be limited testing these days, but these drivers are probably better prepared for F1 than any before them in history. What's arguably more impressive is that the likes of Lewis Hamilton and Fernando Alonso can keep up with them in their forties.

And maybe, just maybe, we should raise the bar of expectations for them, too.

INSIDER

F1 cars' proneness to porpoising is explained by Pat Symonds

Our readers' questions vary from the highly technical to the 'I always wondered why' category. This month's, from Stewart Moore, falls firmly into the former. He asks why the current cars are so prone to bouncing and porpoising, since even the 2021 cars relied on the throat effect of the flat bottom in front of the diffuser kick and therefore must have been prone to similar effects.

Looking at the 2021 machinery, these were effectively what were known as flat-bottomed cars. What this meant was that the floor could not have any real curvature in a fore/aft sense between the front of the floor and the start of the diffuser. Rearward of this, which is essentially from the front face of the rear wheels, the floor was allowed to open up vertically in the area known as the diffuser. A limitation on the height of the trailing edge effectively limited the diffuser expansion, and hence the amount of load that could be generated by the floor.

More significantly in this context, the regulations dictated that two planes (horizontal surfaces) had to exist underneath the car. At the car centre line this plane, known as the reference plane, was the lowest part of the car and had to be at least 300mm wide and extend from 430mm behind the front wheel centre line all the way to the rear centre line. This is the surface that the plank or skid block is attached to. Either side of this was what was called the step plane, which was 50mm higher and extended from the same forward position to the start of the diffuser.

The step plane, being relatively high, ensured that there was no chance of sealing the underbody to the ground. This severely limited the effectiveness of any ground-effect downforce generation and equally ensured that the underbody aerodynamics were very stable.

The way to generate downforce with these cars was to run very high rake; in other words a very low front ride height and very high rear ride height. This allowed expansion under the length of the car in the same way as a diffuser works, but left a large gap for the air to escape sideways. This is why the so-called Y250 vortex was so important. This was a vortex generated by a discontinuity on the front wing, which twisted its way down the length of the car in an attempt to make an air seal at the edge of the floor and improve the underbody load.

For the current cars, the design intent was all about producing a benign wake to mitigate the loss of downforce of following cars and bodywork that was also less affected by running in a leading car wake. This was done to an extent by producing more underbody load by allowing more curvature in the floor and getting rid of the step plane in order to allow the throat, the lowest part of the floor, to be closer to the ground. This greatly improved the amount of load that could be generated by the floor but, in order to generate that load, it now became imperative to run very close to the ground front and rear – very different to the previous generation of cars.

The suspension was made very stiff to try to maintain low ride heights at both high and low speed – the natural tendency of course is that the car will be pulled down on its suspension as the speed and hence aerodynamic load increases.

While the design intent of allowing cars to follow more closely was achieved, the combination of maintaining the throat of the floor very low and the very stiff suspension that this required resulted in an unstable aerodynamic condition.

This unstable condition arose from two areas. Firstly, if the throat got too close to the ground it could choke, limiting its flow and effectiveness, thereby reducing downforce. This in turn led to the ride height increasing and stability being restored. Secondly, the vortices produced by the strakes at the entry to the floor underneath the radiator inlets could burst at low ride heights, which again reduced the effectiveness of the floor. This overstressed condition led to downforce being generated to a point where it forced the car too close to the ground whereupon the downforce diminished, and the car rose again such that downforce was regained. This of course is a thoroughly unstable condition.

> *"It now became imperative to run very close to the ground front and rear"*

To illustrate the importance of the floor, under the current regulations up to 60% of the downforce is generated by the floor and bodywork, the rest coming from the front and rear wings. With the previous generation of cars this figure was more like 50%.

The good news is that the 2026 regulations have found new ways of preserving good – in fact even better – wake characteristics while reducing the dependency of very low ride heights and unstable aerodynamic features, meaning that next year we can hope to see racing remain very close without the bouncing that the current cars exhibit.

Want to ask Pat a tech question for a future issue? Let us know on autosport@autosport.com

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All the cars

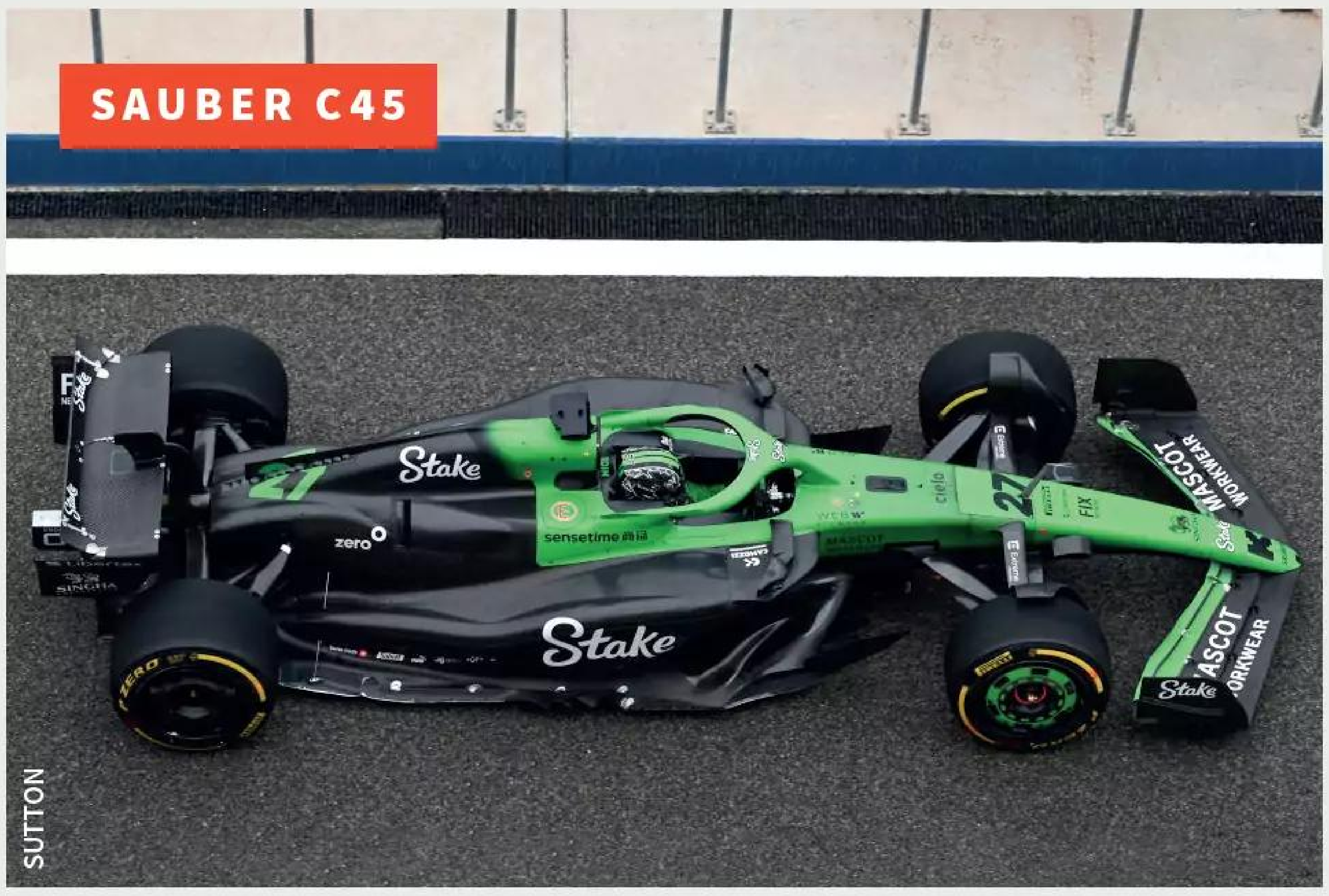
Ten new F1 cars took their bow for pre-season testing in Bahrain. Here's a snapshot of the 2025 field before the campaign begins

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

RED BULL RB21

GALLOWAY

SAUBER C45



SUTTON

WILLIAMS FW47

CAREZZEVOLI

FERRARI SF-25

MASON

ALPINE A525

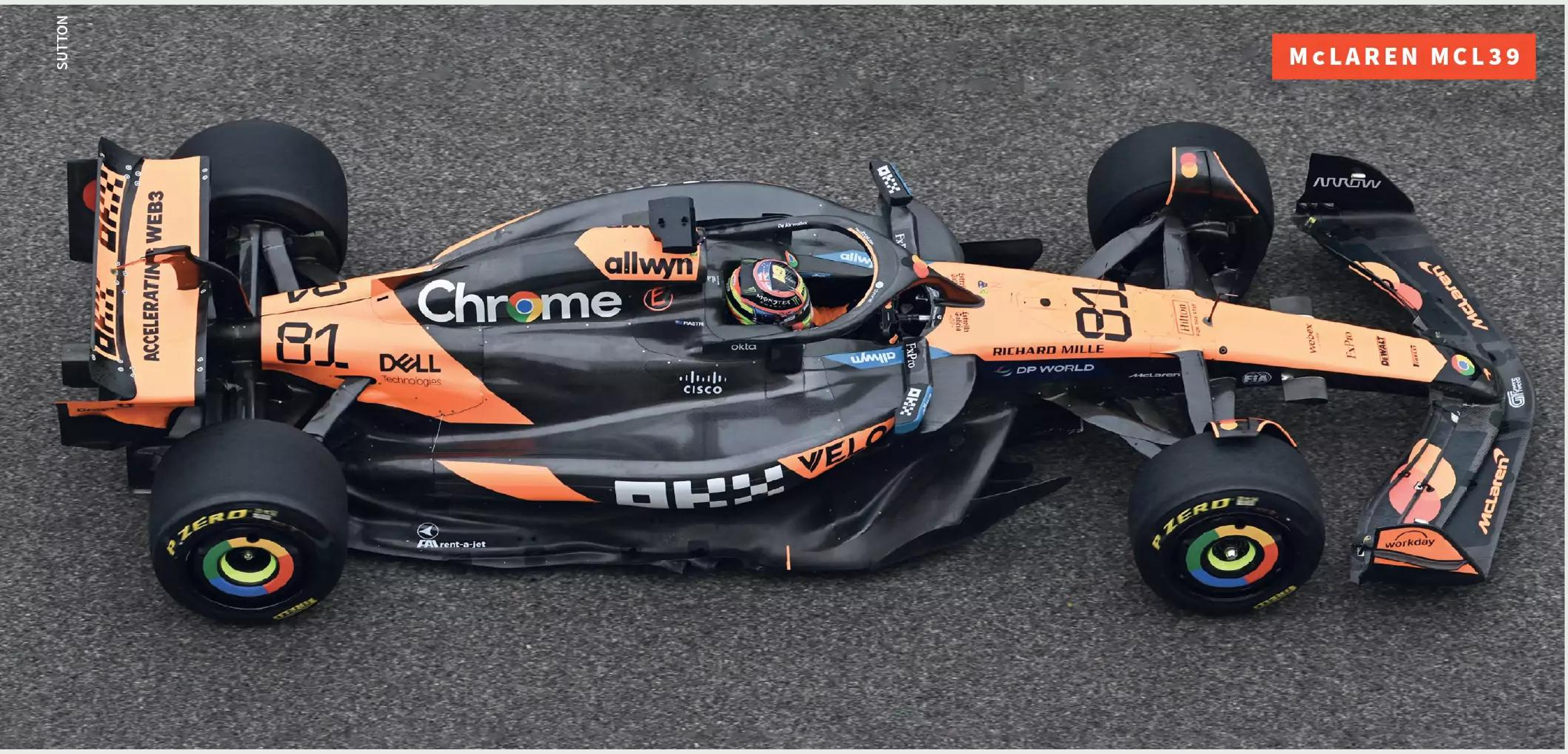
THOMPSON

RB VCARB 02

MASON

ASTON MARTIN AMR25

CAREZZEVOLI


SUTTON

McLAREN MCL39

SBLOXHAM

HAAS VF-25

MERCEDES W16

MASON

McLaren looks strong in a tale of the unexpected

A Williams set the fastest time in pre-season testing amid a series of bizarre events in Bahrain, but a crunching of the data suggests that the team from Woking starts 2025 as favourite

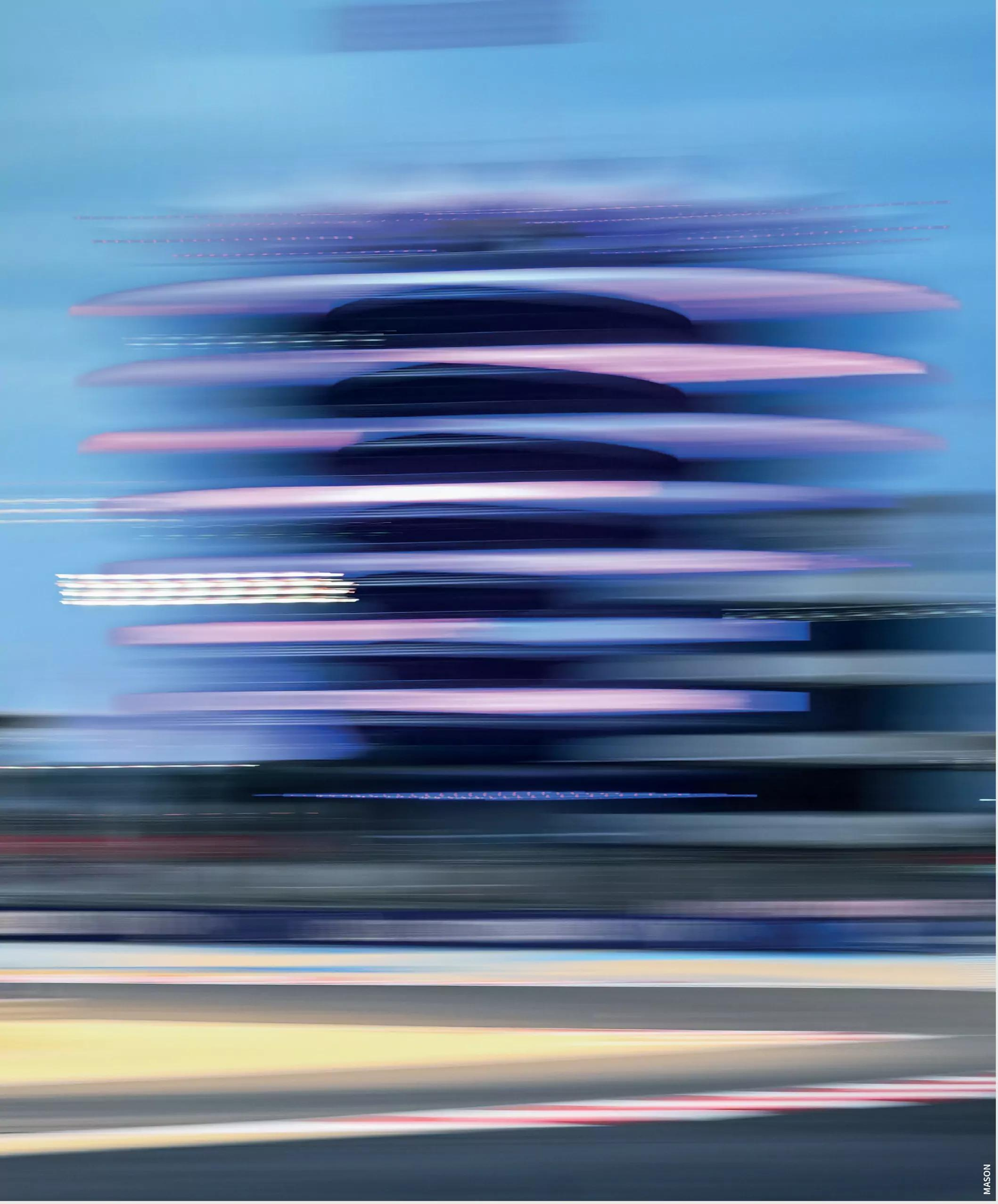
ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

The stone flicked off Ollie Bearman's Haas and smashed the glass panel of the start/finish control gantry overlooking the main straight of the Bahrain International Circuit. This was shortly before lunchbreak on the last of three days of Formula 1 pre-season testing at the desert track, and was just one in a series of bizarre incidents.

Day one had been running smoothly ever since Mercedes newboy Andrea Kimi Antonelli was first onto the track for the start of six four-hour sessions. Then, with two hours of the afternoon/evening session remaining, the Sakhir track was suddenly plunged into darkness. A failure at a nearby external substation had caused a power cut, which took over an hour to address. After dramatic scenes of cars circulating when the gigantic spotlights extinguished, there followed the near-farce of mechanics and drivers using phone torches to continue what work they could.

The running on that first day, which would be extended by an hour, was already dominated by chat about the conditions – unusually cold and windy, with peak temperatures down over 10C from those in 2024 testing. Spots of rain had been felt in the paddock throughout the



MASON

power outage, and a heavier deluge hit the following day. This meant that, for the first time in Bahrain since 2017, intermediate tyres were required – but only two teams had any available. And of Haas and Aston Martin, only Esteban Ocon was sent out for a series of slow, staccato runs on the green-walled compound. The rest had not included any wet-weather rubber among their total allocation of 35 sets of tyres per team. Another hour was lost.

While the interruption to sweep up Bearman's glass was brief, the red flag was activated later on the final day when a bus used to ferry track workers around the sprawling site somehow found its way into the Turns 9-10 run-off as the final session got under way. An upturned chair, blown through a barrier opening behind the quick, plunging esses in sector two earlier in the day, had been eventually retrieved by a marshal under a fleeting yellow flag.

But there was familiarity crammed beneath the peculiar, and the data we clocked over these interrupted days confirmed that F1 2025 should be a very exciting campaign. Here is the order in which the teams stacked up during their first proper running of the year. »

Headline times don't tell full story of McLaren's strength

SBLOXHAM

1 McLAREN

McLaren goes into the 2025 season as the pick of the close-knit leading pack, even if its strength is masked by the headline times. These were led by Williams driver Carlos Sainz, with McLaren just fifth quickest overall thanks to Oscar Piastri's efforts on day three. But the Australian's run came when Bahrain had finally warmed up, and so presented a rear-tyre-torturing challenge on the track's famously rough surface. Piastri's best of 1m29.940s on Pirelli's C3 compound was 0.6s down on Sainz's test-leading time and 0.4s slower than George Russell would produce for Mercedes to lead the day.

But, as ever, there are caveats around fuel load and engine settings, and one-lap pace can be misleading in testing. Due to the track surface, only a handful of laps were completed on a compound that forms a race 'soft' – the C4, about which Sainz was scathing given the warm-up struggles the drivers were having with it on the cool opening days – and eight teams didn't bother asking Pirelli for anything softer.

McLaren looked mighty on the race simulations it logged on days two and three. Lando Norris set the benchmark with averages of 1m35.514s (C3s for 18 laps), 1m34.395s (C2s for 16) and 1m33.221s (C1s for 10) in the evening running on the second day.

Crunching the data for tyre-compound changes and track evolution put Norris ahead of Antonelli's Mercedes by an average of 0.46s per lap over a comparable race distance (the McLaren's was six laps shorter at 44 total) and 0.47s ahead of Charles Leclerc's Ferrari (45 laps, following the same C3-C1-C2 run plan as Antonelli). Norris got past both during his run and the averages add up to a near-25s 'race' gain.

He suggested that McLaren is lacking "more with the rear than what we would have liked" in terms of grip but, watching from behind the long, sweeping, uphill Turn 11 left-hander, it looked as though Antonelli and particularly Leclerc had the more wayward rear ends. The desire for a stronger rear on a rough track surface is normal, yet the movement from lacking this can help on corner entry in some turns here.

"The car seems to have adapted to the Bahrain requirements a bit better than in previous years," said team principal Andrea Stella, refusing to get carried away. "But the conditions are so unique that they may be masking some of the traditional issues that we may be having, and certainly are making, for instance, traction requirements, stability, much easier."

2 MERCEDES

Surely one of the best Bahrain tests in years for the Silver Arrows. The aura around Mercedes is one of renewal now that Lewis Hamilton has departed, and after testing there is quiet confidence too. But the Brackley squad has long learned to avoid bullish talk... Trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin reckoned that "from the initial signs, we seem to have made good steps" in making the W16 more predictable on handling and faster on rotation without hurting rear-tyre life for Russell and Antonelli.

Mercedes' slight edge on Ferrari in the long-run stakes was repeated on day three – where Russell's 54-lap race sim was 0.36s per lap slower on average than Piastri's 45-tour run at the same time. And Russell was fresh enough to then set the final-day benchmark at 1m29.545s – 0.2s slower than Sainz the day before – with just seven minutes of testing left.

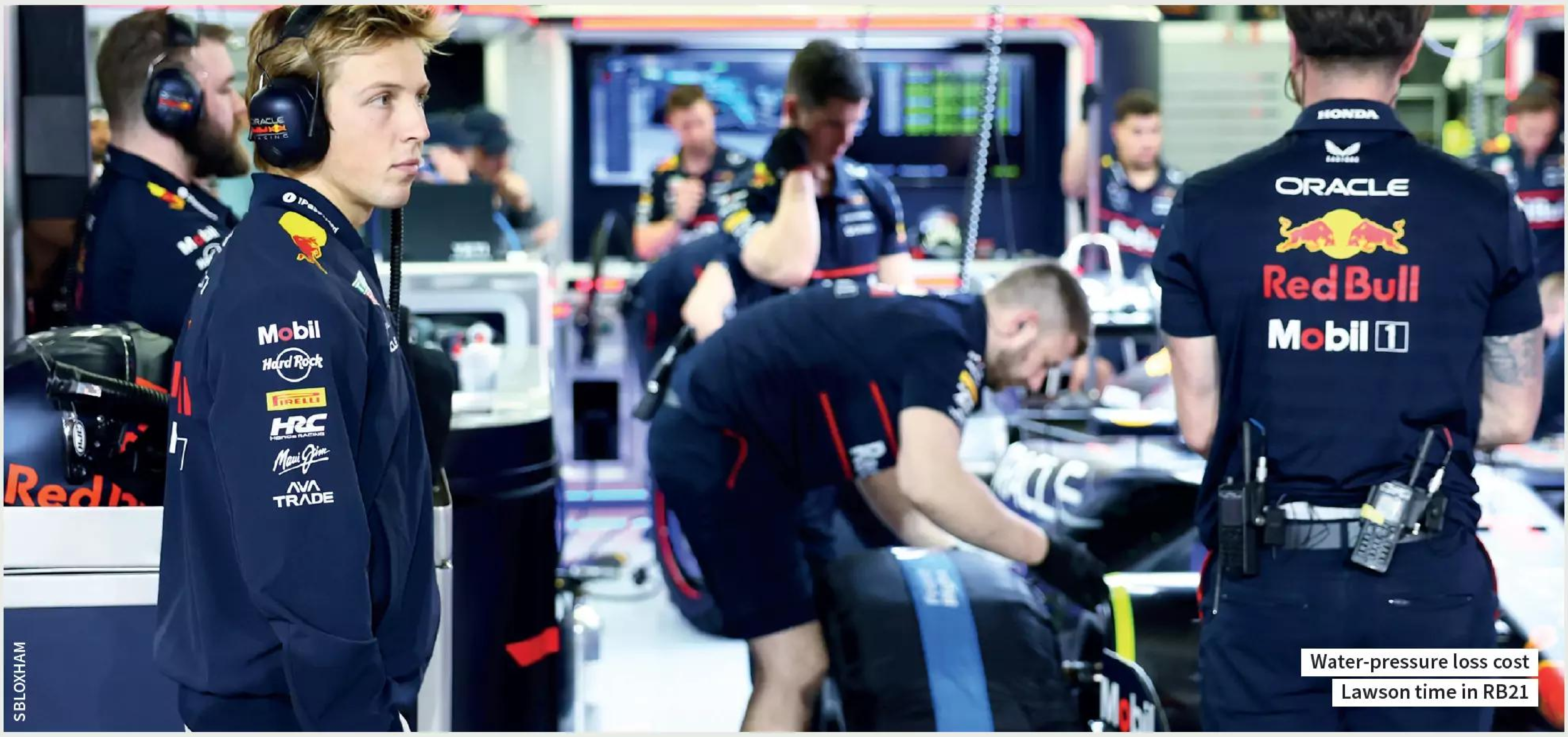
But there are warnings for Mercedes. First, team boss Toto Wolff replied "I don't know" when asked whether it had shed its habit of running at the front only in cool conditions. And Antonelli fears that the battery issue that cost him considerable time on the final morning has held back his qualifying preparation. McLaren, by contrast, put the time it spent off-track down to making lengthy set-up adjustments.

But perhaps the biggest warning is that, of the Big Four, Mercedes tends to gain the least between the test and the GP. When you factor in fuel loads and engine modes, its average swing is -0.97s across the six Bahrain test and race events since 2022.

3 RED BULL

By contrast, those averages put Red Bull on -1.05s and McLaren on -1.13s (although the Woking team's testing calamities of 2022-24 mean this figure should be approached with caution). Heading to the season-opening Australian GP, Max Verstappen's squad has one of the two biggest question marks on performance potential at this stage.

The Red Bull RB21 can easily be considered as the McLaren MCL39's closest rival, but the Milton Keynes operation did not have the smooth


SBLOXHAM

Water-pressure loss cost Lawson time in RB21

testing it enjoyed here a year ago, and the starkest warnings from 2024 were actually repeated. The team ended up with the lowest lap count (304, with Mercedes top on 458), largely thanks to an engine water-pressure loss when Liam Lawson was on board for the whole of day two. And the fitting of a new nose for Verstappen on day three meant this had to be baseline checked with a series of installation runs.

These delays cost Red Bull time to put in any comparative race simulations, but an extrapolation of what Lawson did get in over two hefty stints in the second session on day two puts him 0.76s down on Norris on average.

But the bigger issue for Red Bull is the car's handling and its response to set-up changes, which team insiders said was lacking across the test. That's alarming, given a widening of the car's performance envelope at the cost of peak pace was the chief aim in the RB21 compared to the RB20.

When Verstappen initially set to work on the final afternoon, the car was understeering in the slower turns and oversteering in the faster ones, though this got somewhat better as the track temperatures fell, and he logged the team's quickest time of 1m29.566s (fourth fastest overall). Red Bull also seemed to step up notably on flexi-wing tech here – nothing untoward about that for all teams until the Spanish GP, it seems – and so there is still the potential for it to be very successful this year.

4 FERRARI

What Autosport understands was a gearbox hydraulics issue that thwarted Hamilton's first race simulation for his new team wrecked the chance to get a better read on Ferrari. Like Red Bull's, its true performance ceiling is unknown at this stage.

The good news is that Ferrari has gained the most on Bahrain test-to-GP form on average since 2022 – 1.21s – of the frontrunners. This suggests that hefty fuel loads or the weight of aero measuring devices were masking what Leclerc was able to show on day two. The bad is that trackside observations showed the SF-25 to lack the McLaren's class-leading corner rotation, and there was that extra sliding at the »

SUTTON

Mercedes seems quietly confident amid aura of renewal

Williams may have been flattered by cool conditions

LENNON

rear. Before Hamilton's test-ending problem, he was off-track several times and his times suggested severe tyre degradation.

Ferrari did show good performance running when the best times of the test came in on the cool second day, and Hamilton ended up second quickest overall. But how the SF-25 responded elsewhere is most likely why the seven-time champion was reflecting "we know that we've got work to do" to catch McLaren.

There is surely more to come from Ferrari, which historically goes well in Melbourne. But this was a low-key start to the Hamilton era.

5 WILLIAMS

As he did in 2024, Sainz set the quickest time of the test – but this time in Williams blue. It came on the cooler second day, which was the main reason why laps were coming in so close to last year's Bahrain GP pole time.

The FW47's strength seems to be its stable handling platform. At the hottest point of the third day, Alex Albon seemed to require no extra steering stabs while traversing the plunging, off-camber Turn 4, in contrast to drivers in cars fielded by Williams's midfield rivals. And it was quicker in the adjusted long-run data too.

But Williams insiders are wary that, like Mercedes, their car package has historically gone well in cool conditions, so this sounds a note of caution.

ROSE

6 ALPINE

Overall, Alpine must be considered on a par with Williams and Haas, and the midfield group remains incredibly tight based on this running. But the Enstone team's year-on-year gains at the Bahrain track, where it locked out the back row for the race in 2024, are impressive. Like Williams, weight-shedding (to the point where it can actually have a livery in 2025) is a big factor.

Pierre Gasly and Jack Doohan seemed to be regularly wrestling with the A525 at Turn 4, which will be a concern. And on the long runs, a tyre-corrected average for Doohan was 1.03s behind Norris's best for McLaren. At Williams, Albon was just 0.78s down on Norris using the same method on the hotter final day.

7 HAAS

For the second successive Bahrain test, Haas stuck to the high-fuel priority running for new drivers Ocon and Bearman (left) that ended up serving Nico Hulkenberg and Kevin Magnussen so well last year in terms of nailing tyre degradation.

The team's new arrivals just pounded around, racking up the second highest mileage total with 457 laps. Alpine got to 405 and Williams 395, with this trio set for quite the battle in 2025.

Ocon's day three long run was 1.04s slower on average than Piastri's best, with the adjusted metrics. Perhaps of greater concern, however, is Bearman's bodywork issue early on day three, when the engine cover and sidepod top peeled back at speed. Bearman suggested that this is something Haas has encountered before, with the problem understood to relate to how thin the engine cover is, which will surely take a while to address.

8 ASTON MARTIN

The AMR25 is most likely a much better car than this ranking suggests, but there can be no doubt that the test did not go well for Aston Martin.

Things started awkwardly when sensor and other installation

Weight-shedding a key factor in Alpine advance

MASON

problems cost Fernando Alonso laps on the opening morning, but the team kicked on from there and it did seem by day two that its tightly packaged new car was delivering what the Spaniard and Lance Stroll wanted in terms of more benign handling in a range of corner types.

Viewed trackside from the Turns 9-10 complex on day two, the AMR25 was arguably the best handling at this tricky, sidewind-exposed, plunging double-left. Alonso was hitting the same line time and again in a way even Piastri couldn't manage for McLaren. But, by day three, Alonso was having lurid slides exiting the same complex, and Aston didn't show anything in terms of performance or long running.

Much of this was down to illness striking both its drivers, with Stroll missing major time on the last day. Aston was at least pleased that Stroll managed what he could in checking various suspension and ride-height adjustments.

9 RACING BULLS

Again, this team surely has more in hand – strongly suggested by GPS trace data indicating its Honda engine was turned down for the final evening performance running put in by Yuki Tsunoda (and not, seemingly, the case for sister team Red Bull at the same time).

But the test-to-Bahrain race transformation averages tell a different story, with RB gaining just 0.63s on average – the second least of any team. Car weight will be the factor if the engine wasn't putting out its best.

The VCARB 02 was also handling as awkwardly as its name at Turns 4 and 9/10. But RB can surely take some satisfaction in how rookie Isack Hadjar was at least impressively confident that he's rapidly gelled with F1-level machinery.

10 SAUBER

It's not just Sauber propping up the overall test times that suggests the soon-to-be-Audi works squad will likely struggle to escape Q1 in the Melbourne season-opener.

Sauber's long run on the second day was a whopping 1.69s down on McLaren using the adjusted averages, and 0.58s behind Racing Bulls. And it typically gains the least – 0.23s – in turning test form to race reality.

Its livery is utterly uninspiring and the omens were bad from start to finish. New arrival Hulkenberg got a carbon splinter in his eye on day one, and rookie team-mate Gabriel Bortoleto had to endure a hydraulics repair delay on the final day.

MASON

Alonso's line super-consistent on day two

HONE

Not an awful lot to smile about at Sauber

MOTUL

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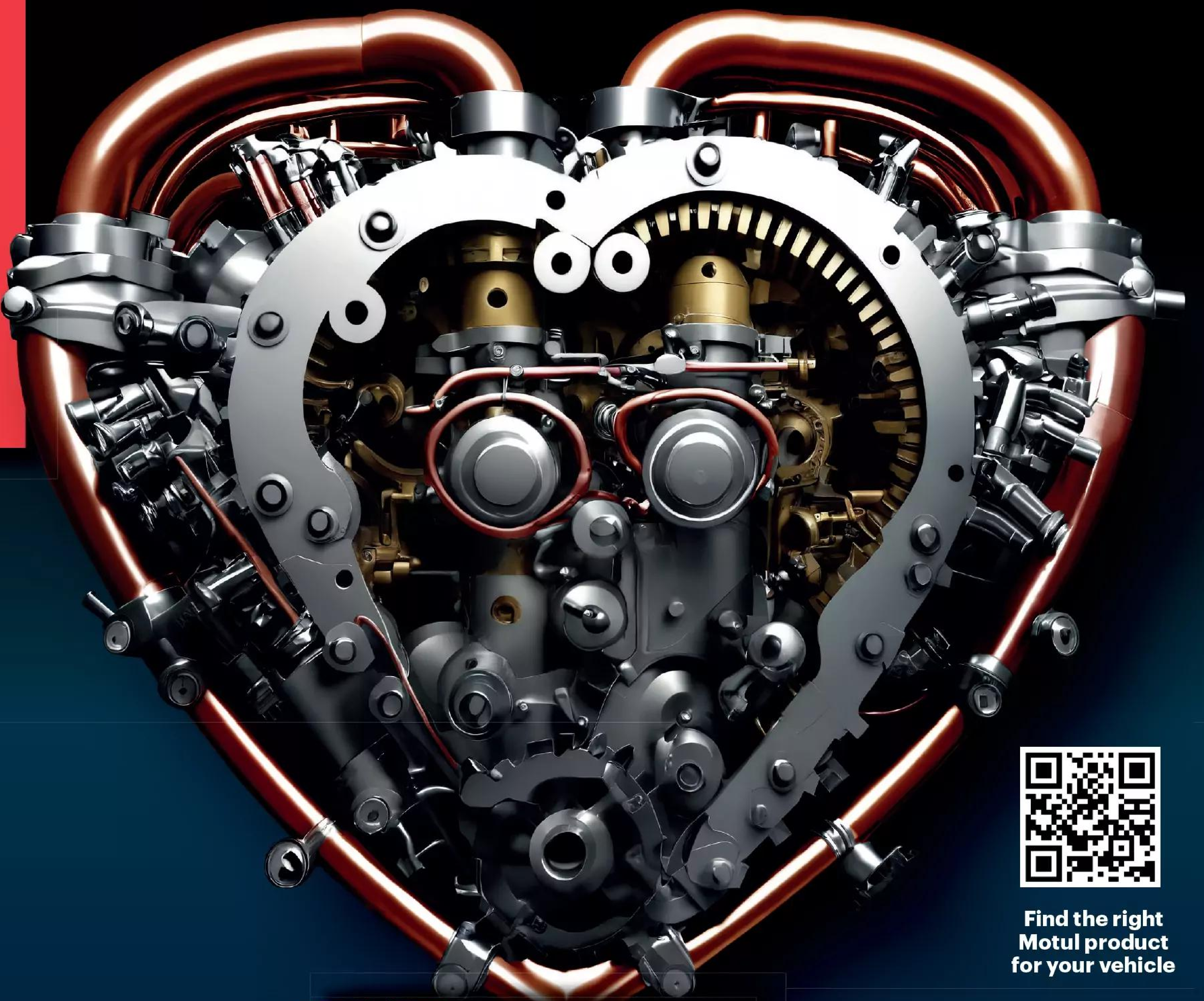

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TESTING DATA, BAHRAIN, 26-28 FEBRUARY

SAKHIR TEST TIMES

POS	DRIVER	CAR	DAY ONE	DAY TWO	DAY THREE	TYRES*
1	**Carlos Sainz**	Williams-Mercedes FW47	1m30.955s	**1m29.348s**	-	C3
2	**Lewis Hamilton**	Ferrari SF-25	1m31.834s	**1m29.379s**	1m30.345s	C3
3	**Charles Leclerc**	Ferrari SF-25	1m30.878s	**1m29.431s**	1m30.811s	C3
4	**George Russell**	Mercedes W16	1m30.587s	1m29.778s	**1m29.545s**	C3
5	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	1m30.674s	-	**1m29.566s**	C3
6	**Alexander Albon**	Williams-Mercedes FW47	1m31.573s	-	**1m29.650s**	C4
7	**Andrea Kimi Antonelli**	Mercedes W16	1m31.428s	**1m29.784s**	1m30.888s	C3
8	**Oscar Piastri**	McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	1m32.084s	1m30.821s	**1m29.940s**	C3
9	**Pierre Gasly**	Alpine-Renault A525	1m31.353s	1m30.430s	**1m30.040s**	C3
10	**Lance Stroll**	Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	1m31.949s	**1m30.229s**	1m31.699s	C3
11	**Liam Lawson**	Red Bull-Honda RBPT RB21	1m31.560s	**1m30.252s**	-	C3
12	**Jack Doohan**	Alpine-Renault A525	1m31.841s	**1m30.368s**	1m31.239s	C3
13	**Lando Norris**	McLaren-Mercedes MCL39	**1m30.430s**	1m30.882s	1m30.943s	C3
14	**Yuki Tsunoda**	RB-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	1m31.610s	1m30.793s	**1m30.497s**	C3
15	**Isack Hadjar**	RB-Honda RBPT VCARB 02	1m31.631s	**1m30.675s**	1m31.761s	C4
16	**Fernando Alonso**	Aston Martin-Mercedes AMR25	1m31.874s	**1m30.700s**	1m32.084s	C3
17	**Esteban Ocon**	Haas-Ferrari VF-25	1m33.600s	1m33.071s	**1m30.728s**	C4
18	**Gabriel Bortoleto**	Sauber-Ferrari C45	1m31.690s	**1m31.057s**	1m32.147s	C3
19	**Nico Hulkenberg**	Sauber-Ferrari C45	1m32.169s	**1m31.457s**	1m31.726s	C3
20	**Ollie Bearman**	Haas-Ferrari VF-25	1m35.522s	1m34.372s	**1m32.361s**	C3

The fastest time for each driver is marked in **bold**, with fastest time of the day in red. *Tyres for fastest lap.

LAPS COMPLETED

POS	TEAM	LAPS COMPLETED
1	**Mercedes**	458
2	**Haas**	457
3	**Racing Bulls**	454
4	**Alpine**	405
5	**Williams**	395
6	**Ferrari**	382
7	**McLaren**	381
8	**Sauber**	354
9	**Aston Martin**	306
10	**Red Bull**	304

POS	ENGINE	LAPS COMPLETED
1	**Mercedes**	1540
2	**Ferrari**	1193
3	**Honda RBPT**	758
4	**Renault**	405

POS	DRIVER	LAPS COMPLETED
1	**Ocon**	260
2	**Hadjar**	243
3	**Russell**	232
4	**Antonelli**	226
5	**Leclerc**	220
6	**Tsunoda**	211
7	**Doohan**	209
8	**Albon**	200
9	**Bearman**	197
10	**Gasly**	196
11	**Piastri**	195
12	**Sainz**	195
13	**Norris**	186
14	**Hulkenberg**	180
15	**Bortoleto**	174
16	**Alonso**	173
17	**Hamilton**	162
18	**Verstappen**	155
19	**Lawson**	149
20	**Stroll**	133

Sainz grabbed headlines with test-topping time

SUTTON

TOTAL LAPS COMPLETED BY ALL CARS TOGETHER
3896

RED FLAGS
4*

*Not counting those activated for F1/FIA system checks (3). All four were for the various track-related issues, none for car stoppages

The tech contests at the end of an era

While design convergence is the name of the game, there's still scope for innovation in the final season of F1's current ruleset

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

FOX

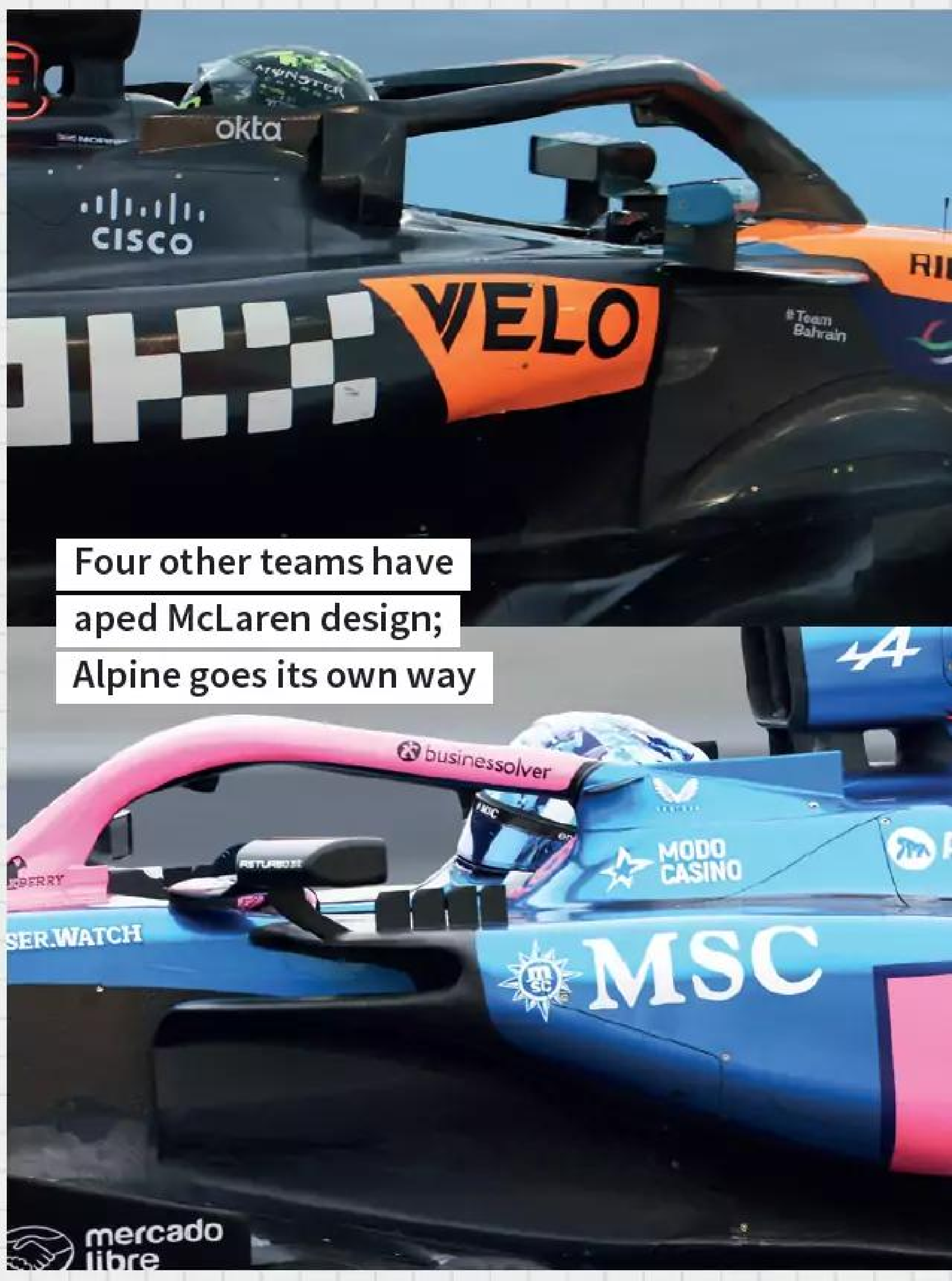
This is it: after four years of teams designing Formula 1 cars to the ruleset introduced for the 2022 season, the fleet of 10 models penned for 2025 will be the last of this generation before attention shifts to 2026.

Since the regulations have been so tight, the eventual convergence in design philosophies was taken as granted, and close performance between cars finally matched that midway through 2024. It was expected that, with 2026 closing in, most teams would opt for a simple evolutionary approach in 2025 and bring largely similar cars to play in the Bahrain season prelude.

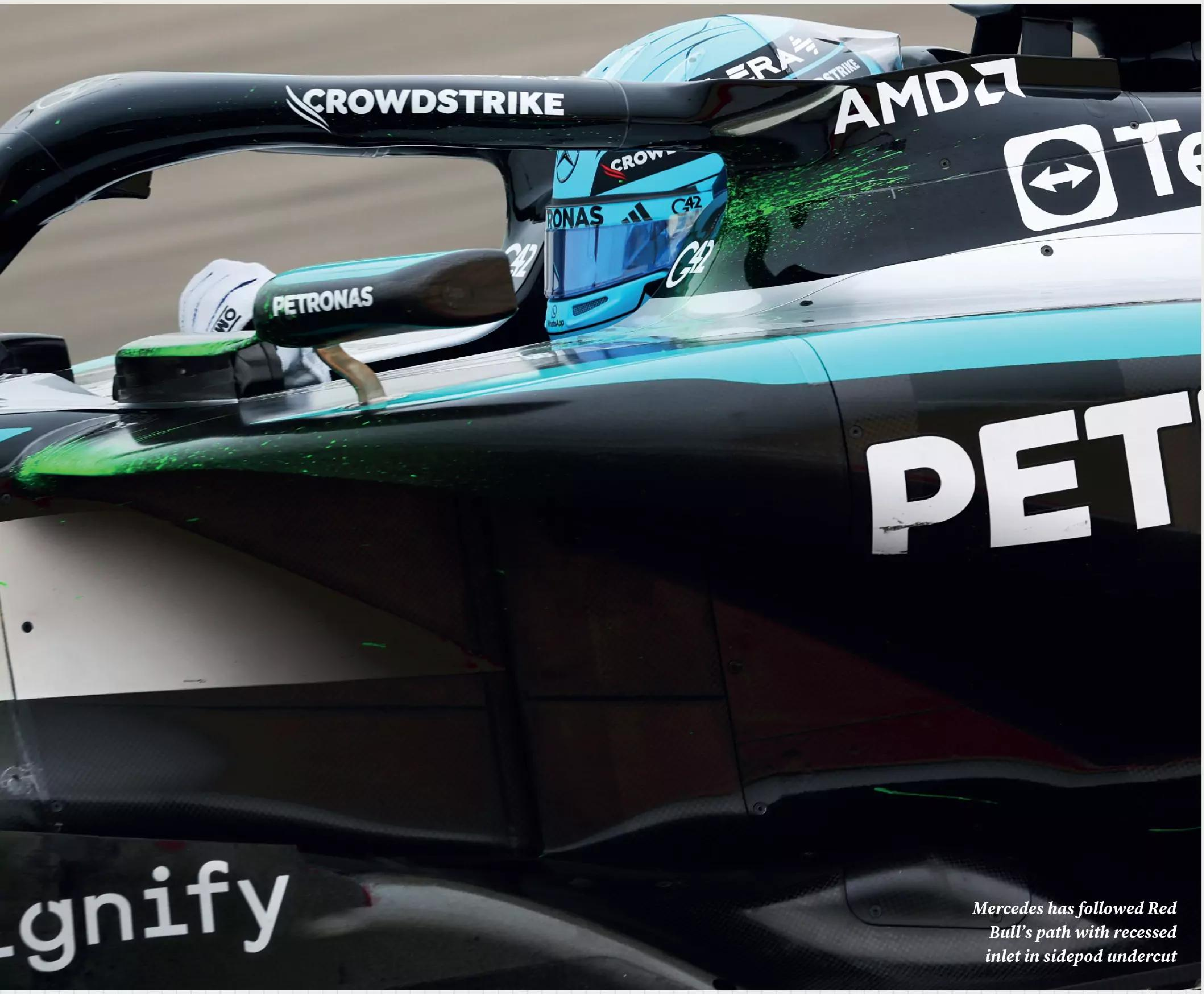
Thankfully, that's not entirely the case; engineers have uncovered the final remnants of innovation and performance available in this ruleset and have taken great pains to avoid becoming complacent in their efforts for the new season. Even Red Bull, which appears to have started the year with a very familiar car concept, is said to have made a glut of changes under the skin to afford its drivers more confidence with the new RB21.

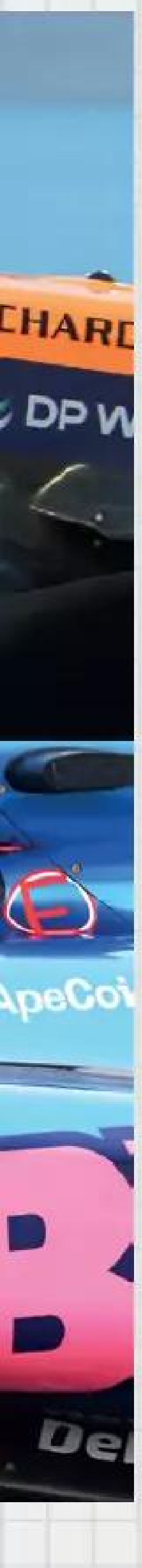
There were plenty of technical twists to pick out over testing, particularly as the F1 75 event made 2025's launch season somewhat atypical. Many of the new cars were not even unveiled before touching down in the Middle East, and if they were via render images, these showed vast differences to the cars on track.

Here are the main topics that caught our eye as the 2025 cars broke cover.



Four other teams have aped McLaren design; Alpine goes its own way


Mercedes has followed Red Bull's path with recessed inlet in sidepod undercut


TEE

FOX

CONVERGING SIDEPOD TRENDS

Nine of the 10 F1 teams have opted to follow the 'overbite' sidepod direction, albeit with two diverging ideas on inlet positioning. These two differing approaches were pioneered by Red Bull and McLaren last year, and the other teams have spread themselves across both camps with their 2025 designs. Red Bull's decision to recess its inlet into the sidepod undercut has been adopted by Mercedes, Williams and Racing Bulls; all four have a leading edge that pulls airflow down into a clear undercut, in which the inlet is set back. In that undercut, some teams have opted to use a slight bulge to mitigate any effects of lift here.

McLaren's design, which features a reduced thickness overwing sitting above a more conventional inlet, has been adopted by Ferrari, Aston Martin, Haas and Sauber. This offers a bit more control over the inlet size. Adopting the Red Bull design is often augmented by a secondary vertical inlet sat alongside the chassis flanks, while McLaren's inlet can be defined as a P-shape to allow this to form a sole aperture. Of the five teams with this design style, Haas's approach is arguably the most modest with the shortest-chord overwing. The American team had adopted the design trait last season.

Alpine is something of a black sheep here, in that it appears to have remained with its 'underbite' inlet – where the leading edge sits at the bottom of the inlet. This is true of the outer ¾ of the inlet, but the inner quarter opens up at the bottom to allow the air to follow the flow led by the overbite inlets.

This change in direction offers a bit more control over the division of flow between the top surface of the sidepod and the inlet, effectively shoring up the clarity of airflow by reducing the amount of turbulent air getting in. Alpine's unique design appears to do this in a different manner by shielding some of the inlet from turbulent flow through the position and shape of its undercut.

Creating a large undercut in the front face of the sidepod shortens the path of airflow around the sidepod, which ensures that it loses minimal energy on its path towards the rear of the car. And, versus the vast suite of sidepods seen during 2022, the converge-and-iterate style of design has now brought the team to very similar points of design – with just two major defining differences.

SUSPENSION: TO PUSHROD OR NOT TO PUSHROD

Debates over the merits of pushrod suspension versus pullrod have continued into 2025, with a handful of teams making a switch at both the front and rear of the car. Of the Big Four, Ferrari is the sole team to change from 2024 following its decision to implement a pullrod layout at the front. According to technical chief Loic Serra, the SF-24 did not have much more room for progress – hence the more radical approach for the SF-25.

Which layout is better? It's a matter of preference, and a result of work between the vehicle dynamicists and aerodynamicists in defining what serves their concepts the best. Front pushrods probably have a little more aerodynamic flexibility in some regard, but positioning the torsion bars and rockers on top of the chassis will raise its centre of gravity slightly. Putting them at the bottom of the chassis and activating them via pullrod will lower that.

Curiously, Ferrari has not strayed from the pullrod rear; most of the teams adopting a pullrod front layout have switched to pushrods for aero reasons. Here, ensuring the springs and rockers are higher up ensures that there is more space available for airflow expansion within the rear section of the floor. But, again, centre of gravity is the trade-off – evidently, Ferrari feels it is best served by keeping that low.

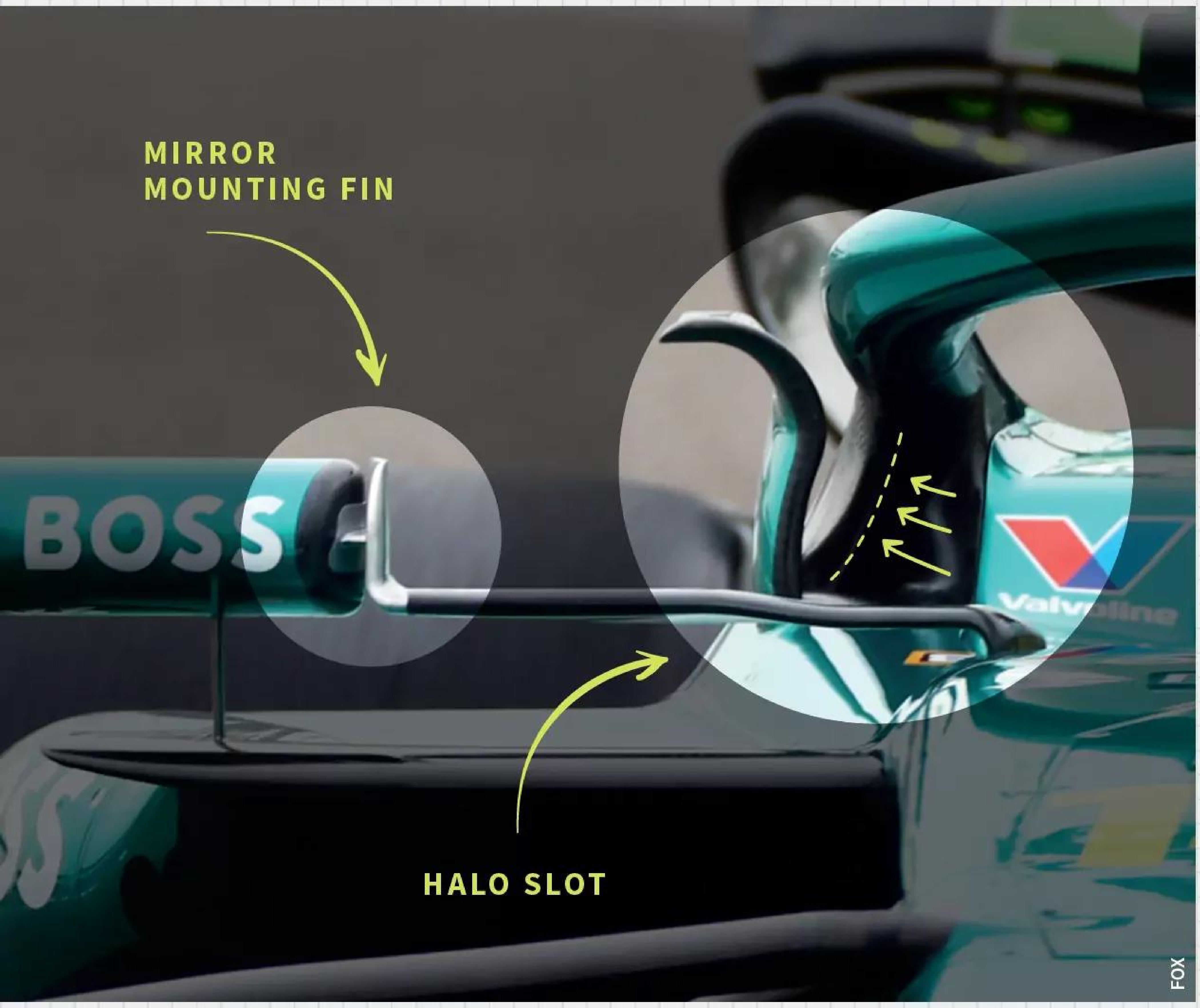
Given that Haas uses a common suspension package with Ferrari, it has also retained the pullrod rear; Sauber, by contrast, produces its own gearbox casing with Ferrari internals to allow it to run a pushrod at the rear. Williams, having now upgraded to Mercedes' 2025 suspension package, keeps the front pushrod formula but now has rear pushrods to achieve that effect of maximising floor space.

There's more to the suspension layouts than push-and-pullrods, however. The positioning of the wishbones and direction of load paths will also bestow the car with the dynamic properties needed to get the floor working efficiently. McLaren's upper wishbone is a distinct example of this, since its rear leg attaches at a much lower point on the chassis flanks to such an extent that it gets close to the lower wishbone mounting points.

This, depending on its positioning relative to the car's centre of gravity, should allow the team to explore an enhanced level of anti-dive to keep the floor body relatively static under braking, despite load transfer to the front.

While Ferrari has switched to a pullrod front layout, it has also opted not to employ a pushrod rear

CAREZZEVOLI



WHERE HAS EACH TEAM INNOVATED?

The iterative nature associated with coming to the end of a technical ruleset suggests that innovations are generally few and far between, but that hasn't stopped Aston Martin from pursuing a visually different car in the hope of arresting its 2024 slide.

The AMR25 has two key areas of intrigue, the first being its compressed engine cover. Its length from front to rear has been shortened, offering more space for the trailing-edge fin to straighten up the airflow to the rear aero components. The team described this fin as "jagged", with a corner cut-out to help strengthen the flow here.

The team was also seen in testing with a slot between the cockpit sidewalls and the halo mountings. It is not necessarily obvious if this feeds an outlet further back, but early indications suggest that this is an auxiliary cooling opening similar to the driver-side inlets that Red Bull ran in 2024.

Further innovations lie in tiny details, as decreed by the tightness of regulations in this current ruleset. Haas was spotted with a rear wing where the upper plane extrudes forward at the tips, allowing it to pick up airflow sooner and build the necessary vortices to strengthen the flow and work the wing harder. To compensate for this, the mainplane is shorter in chord length, with visibly large cutouts where it meets the endplate. Ferrari has also trialled a version of this, which was pioneered by Mercedes last season.

One minor testing subplot was a brief suggestion that teams were exploring the mini-DRS concept introduced by McLaren last year, a solution where the rear wing slot gap opened slightly at high speed to dump drag in a straight line. This was part of the rationale behind F1's further clampdown on flexing aerodynamics, where more stringent tests will take place on rear wings from the opening round. Further to that, slot gap size was reduced by a tiny amount in the 2025 regulations, the rules now stating that the gap between rear wing elements cannot change position outside of the use of DRS.

This is something that should be filed, for now, under 'requires further investigation' – and how this fits into the application of renewed flex tests at the Australian Grand Prix. Although cars are encouraged to be legal in testing, there is generally no stewards' presence and therefore such tests are rarely employed.

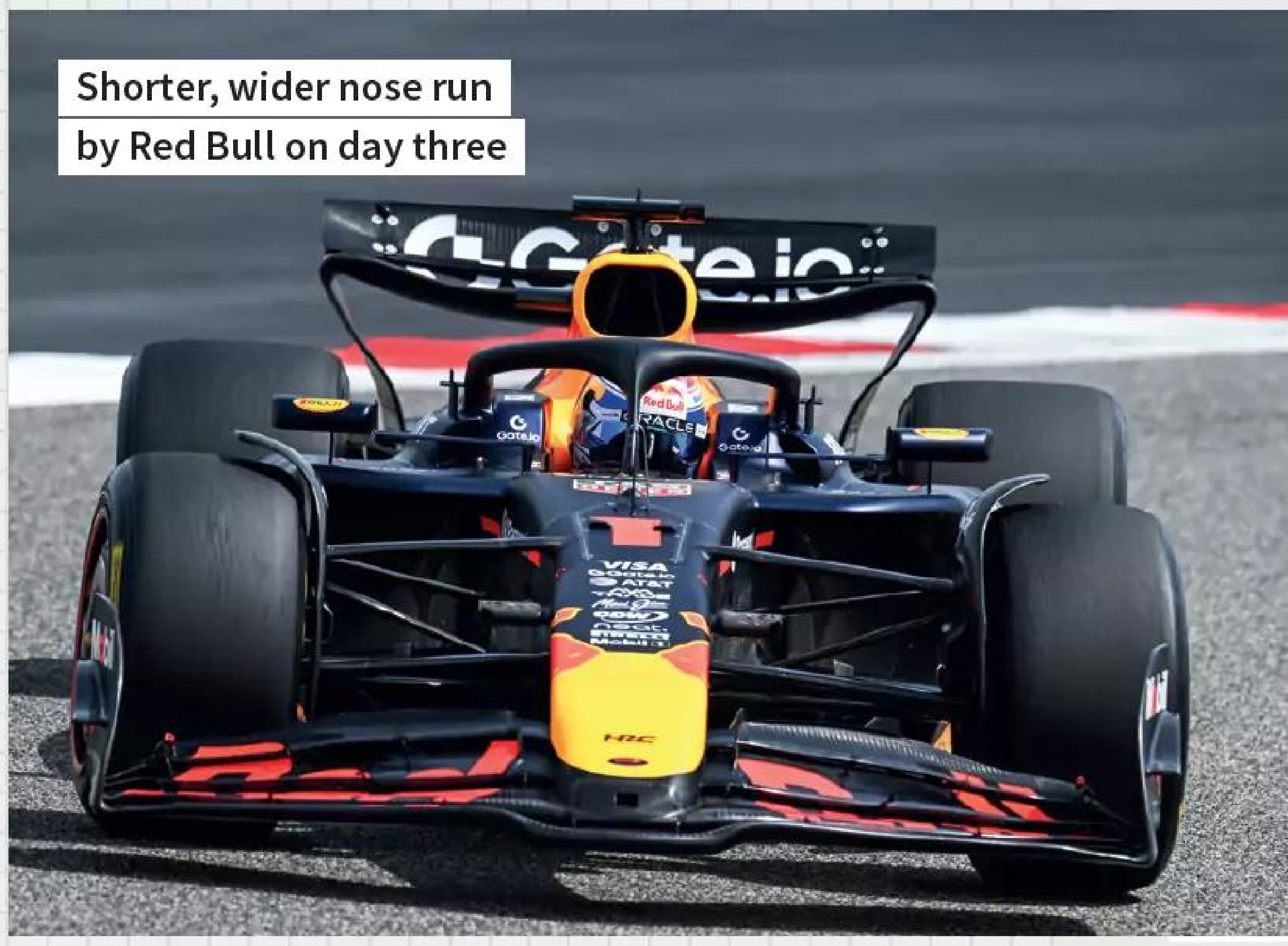
MID-TESTING NOSE JOBS FOR RED BULL AND MERCEDES

Red Bull debuted a new nose on the final day of the test, giving the RB21 something of a facelift after emerging with a distinct similarity to its predecessor. Although the longer nose with a tip extruded to the mainplane was retained for the first two days, the team opted to switch to a shorter, wider nose for the bulk of day three.

Widening the nose reduces the total span of front wing elements either side of the nose but frees up the central section of the mainplane, which should compensate for this to a degree. The step in the mainplane has shrunk a little bit in the meantime; less of that mainplane is lower to the ground to fit the curvature of the other wing elements.

Mercedes also swapped between two noses through the test, opening with a shorter nose and electing to switch between that and its longer trunk throughout the three days. Having two different nose approaches gives the team latitude to consider its options with the required downforce levels for each circuit. Opening up the slot gap will be a consideration here, depending on whether the trackside aerodynamicists feel the extra under-nose flow will be of value.

A few teams have changed their noses over the off-season, or at least continued with mid-season switches from 2024, as they attempt to set up the airflow moving backwards on the front foot. Aston Martin switched to a longer pointed nose for 2025, while Alpine stuck with a version of its shorter snout from its late-2024 developments. Williams has also opted for change, moving towards a more compact nose structure – arguably made possible by its composites advances thanks to investment in its Grove facilities.


Shorter, wider nose run by Red Bull on day three

MASON

KOMATSU
DURACELL
betway
Stephens
Kraken
MYPROTEIN
ATLASSIAN WILLIAMS RACING
Gulf
PIRELLI

WILLIAMSRACING

WILLIAMS F1 DRIVER

CARLOS SAINZ

“WE HAD, HONESTLY, THE TWO BUSIEST MONTHS OF MY CAREER. I’VE BEEN SQUEEZED TO THE MAXIMUM BY WILLIAMS IN THE FACTORY”

SUTTON/GETTYIMAGES

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY **WILLIAMS RACING** AND **GETTY IMAGES**

There's something about Carlos Sainz that sets him apart from his fellow Formula 1 drivers: he's always worth listening to.

Take his theory about how pre-season testing could be improved. Given the teams are these days spending considerable sums flying their drivers from (mainly) Monaco to work on the simulators in their sprawling factories, often for single days at a time, they should instead club together and do another eight to 10 days of real pre-season running with their new machinery.

Assuming such costs add up to less than flying the many team personnel around the world to run those cars, it illustrates how Sainz thinks differently to his peers. And now that he's a director of the Grand Prix Drivers' Association, he'll be thinking on their behalf a lot more these days.

As he settles into his new home at Williams, he chats to Autosport during the final day of pre-season testing in Bahrain. With his time in the FW47 complete until rocking up in Melbourne for the opening race of the season – the scene of his famous win last year – Sainz is ready to offer his wise, considered thoughts on his start to life away from Ferrari...

So, here in Bahrain at the end of February, it's now been almost two months since you officially started at Williams, plus you had the Abu Dhabi test as well. How have you found this team now you're here?

Yeah, well first of all, the Abu Dhabi test, I got a good first impression in terms of how I saw a team that was honestly really motivated, very happy. And also to have me there and to start pushing. And I think the Abu Dhabi test was positive, was very good progress made in that day. Very important test for me to get that first feel for everything. And it gave us homework to do over the winter.

And then we had, honestly, probably the two busiest months of my career. I've been squeezed to the maximum by Williams in the factory. I spent more time than in any other team back at base doing simulator sessions and meetings with everyone from the factory, but also with HPP [Mercedes High Performance Powertrains, Williams's engine supplier and one Sainz had not sampled in his F1 career].

And, yeah, it's been my busiest winter. I probably didn't put as much focus, or as much as I wish, onto my physical preparation – because we're just so busy learning so much of the other stuff that I hope it pays off. Very busy, but very positive, very interactive. And a lot going on, I must say.

Well, my next question was going to be, 'Was there anything that surprised you at Williams as you joined?' But maybe it's the busy-ness. Was that something that you weren't expecting after leaving Ferrari?

Yeah. Busy-ness is a good one. I think busy-ness has surprised me how much the team – both my race engineer and the rest of the team – is demanding from me to be on top of. I'm always very [thinking], like if they would not be demanding, I would be the one demanding these meetings and asking to be in the sim. But the fact that it's come from the team gives me a good impression in terms of how switched on everyone is and how driven everyone is to make progress and to hear from things and to interact and share different things. So that was definitely a good one.

And then second, I think it doesn't surprise me because I could already sense it, but the team spirit seems to be very good. Like, everyone seems to be on board with the vision and the project of JV [James Vowles, team boss] and the top management, Dorilton. Everyone seems to be excited about the project. Everyone is 100% behind the management and you can tell everyone seems in a happy place. Everyone is comfortable to be proud to be part of the journey and Williams. And this gives me, for sure, the most important good impression.

It sounds then like you already had a bit of an inkling of what things were like inside the team. But what did you think of Williams in the years before you considered joining the squad? It's been quite a journey this team's been on – even just in recent years. So, what would you think of Williams when you looked at it through that time you were racing for other teams?

I think, obviously, we all remember the most difficult Williams years. You know – 2019, 2020, 2021 – when the team looked in serious trouble. I think since Dorilton took over and JV arrived, I think we [as F1 drivers] all have looked at how that thing was developing. And I think they managed to turn it around very quickly, with the progress and the project, the vision, that they are showing. And I think everyone agrees in 2025, that since 2021-22, there's been a clear trend of positiveness and progress.

That probably was also one of the key things that convinced me to join the project last year. And now I see and feel that the most important thing for us this year is just to keep showing progress. Keep following that trend – that's the most important thing.

> "A CLEAR TREND OF POSITIVENESS AND PROGRESS WAS ONE OF THE KEY THINGS THAT CONVINCED ME TO JOIN THE PROJECT"

Even before signing up, Sainz had a strong sense of team's vision and sense of purpose under Vowles

MASON/GETTY IMAGES

His physical prep has had to take a bit of back seat as winter of "busy-ness" culminated in Bahrain test

MASON/GETTY IMAGES

Sainz reckons the motivation that comes from opportunity to build something with Williams is underestimated

MASON/GETTY IMAGES

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

HORSBURGH/GETTY IMAGES

Above: turning 30 gave Sainz, pictured with the legend that is his dad, impetus to take GPDA role

Right: Spaniard showed his class with last year's Australian GP win on return after appendectomy

“I’M NOT GOING TO LIE, THERE WAS SIX MONTHS OF NEGOTIATING WITH MANY TEAMS, WHICH WAS QUITE TOUGH”

Now, probably, lots of people have asked you this already this week, maybe even in the weeks previously around the car launches and F175. But, just going back exactly a year to the situation you were in and knowing you were out of Ferrari, what can you tell us about how you were really thinking at that time and how you were dealing with that news?
Well, first of all, I had the winter of 2024 to digest it. It wasn’t easy to digest it because I think I went from being 99% convinced I was staying in Ferrari [and getting a new contract beyond 2024] to suddenly being out of Ferrari. So, it took me time to digest it and to make peace with that. Make peace in my head with the fact that I was not going to be in Ferrari as long as I thought I was going to be.

Obviously, at the time, I felt like I deserved to stay at Ferrari. And, obviously, I wanted to keep proving to myself and to everyone that I still deserved to be part of Ferrari, even if a seven-time world champion decided to move. And that did me well. I think it created a good effect in myself through the year, and I managed to convert that into driven and positive energy for the season, and I did a good step [in early 2024].

Then, I’m not going to lie, there was those six months of negotiating with many teams and hearing from also a couple of the top teams to see what they were thinking, which was quite tough. And very busy times on the phone and at the circuits – having meetings with many people and having to split performing in Ferrari with a good car, doing podiums and trying to win races, with negotiating all these things.

Plus, I was having some very positive feedback from top teams. Then they were saying, ‘Maybe it’s not going to happen, maybe yes, maybe no’. It is distracting and it was messing with my head at the time. But I managed to keep it more or less OK going through the year.

And then I feel like once I cleared up my future and decided about Williams, I think the second half of the season was quite strong for me. And I felt like I was in a better place and already excited to join here for the following year.

Do you get frustrated by those types of questions? And I only ask because I thought back to the launch of the FW47 at Silverstone and, while I’ve done it as well, lots of questions kept coming up about how you’re feeling about going from Ferrari, to stepping down the grid, being frank, with Williams? There seemed to be a note of something about that line of questioning – is that right?
Honestly, I understand it and I don’t mind it. Because I get the feeling like you guys also, in a way, are backing me up with the fact that you guys, in a way, think I’m going through something. Because maybe you guys believe I still belong to the front of the grid and not to the midfield pack.

And that gives me a positive feedback. Like, if these guys keep asking me, ‘How is it going to feel?’ and all these sorts of things, it gives me the feeling that, ‘OK, these guys at least value me also, because they believe it should be difficult for me, given the performances of last year, to be [going] back’.

The reality is that, for me, it’s equally important to feel at home in the team and to be fighting at the front of the field in Formula 1. I think to feel like home, I felt it in McLaren really well. I think I’m bringing the best out of any Formula 1 driver. And the fact that I’m building something with Williams also motivates me a lot more than what people think.

And, yes, I know I’m taking probably a step back in terms of overall performance for a couple of years. But if we actually manage to build something out of this, and I am part of that journey and we manage to make Williams competitive again, there’s nothing that will make me happier or more proud. And this is a fact. This is what motivates me and this is why, for me, it’s fundamental to see the team be as driven as I am to make this happen – because this is what keeps me happy.

Now, turning to a rather different topic: you’ve joined the Grand Prix Drivers’ Association. I wonder if you could please explain what was the process for becoming a director? And why do you want to do it and what do you want to achieve with that role?
Well, for me it was all about when I turned 30 last year and I felt like I’ve achieved a certain level of maturity and understanding of how Formula 1 works – both on track and outside of the track. And over the last few years I’ve been more and more in touch with Alex [Wurz, GPDA chairman], worried about different topics. And at some stage last year, and this year during the winter, once I reflected on where I’m at being 30 years old, where I want to go, I really believe I can help the GPDA. And help my sport to become better in some certain things that I find common sense and logical.

And I called Alex and said, ‘Look, I think I would like to present my case for joining the GPDA’. Also, for us as directors, also knowing that before there was only one active driver [George Russell] as a director and I thought it could be good [for there to be another]. Also maybe for the interest of the sport given that I’m not going to be in that fight at the front of the grid this year, just having someone maybe a bit more out of those heated battles at the front, also giving an opinion, would be helpful.

I’m for sure trying to help with whatever I can. So, yeah, I offered myself and everyone agreed and it came quite naturally.

Hamilton joins Leclerc's red army

Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc would be Formula 1's most tantalising driver match-up even if they weren't partnered at Ferrari, a team that comes freighted with its own historic expectations and internal politics...

ROBERTO CHINCHERO

FERRARI

CHE VINCA O CHE PERDA
IERI, OGGI, PER SEMPRE
FERRARI SI AMA
UNO DI NOI
Welcome HAM

FERRARI

Hamilton's first Ferrari outing drew local crowds and grabbed headlines worldwide

Fiorano in winter isn't the ideal place and time to spend a day outdoors. The province of Modena is a pulsating industrial heart, and yet it's still an area where human life generally flows peacefully and traffic is usually not a major issue. However, 19 February this year provided a powerful exception to this state of affairs.

That Wednesday, from the early hours of the morning, traffic between Modena and Fiorano was pretty much paralysed owing to the sheer number of cars converging on Ferrari's private track. Something important was in the air, and more than 7000 people didn't hesitate to take the day off from work or school, brave the chilly temperatures, and scramble for the best vantage point beyond the fences guarding the boundaries of this hallowed place.

Ferrari supporters have always been deeply connected to their team, even in the toughest moments, but this day promised to be nothing less than historic. You could almost feel the emotional charge pulsing through the crowd. During the long weeks when the F1 engines had remained silent since the end of last season, an overwhelming wave of passion and anticipation had been building. Lewis Hamilton's arrival in Maranello represents the union of the most successful driver in F1 history with the most famous and decorated team in the sport. Nobody here wanted to tell their grandchildren that they had an opportunity to see Hamilton's first laps in his new Ferrari SF-25, but couldn't get the time off work.

As great as national expectations are, excitement is building well beyond Italian borders. In late January, Hamilton's first official appearance in the historic square within the Fiorano circuit, and his maiden appearance at the wheel of a Ferrari – albeit a two-year-old SF-23 – had sparked global interest. Just one post on X-formerly-known-as-Twitter of Hamilton in his new race suit was reckoned to be worth tens of thousands of dollars to Ferrari and its sponsors. The cash registers continued to clang on 19 February as pictures and video circulated of the Brit essaying his first laps in Ferrari's 2025 car. In between, the F175 'season launch' at London's O2 Arena provided a different setting but the same theme: Hamilton, dressed in red, stealing the show just with his presence.

From the moment Hamilton stepped through the gates of Ferrari's headquarters in Maranello, he became part of the team's world. In Italy there wasn't a single bar where fans weren't talking about Hamilton in red, eager to see his move to Ferrari as the final piece of a perfect package to chase the world championship title.

The excitement surrounding Hamilton's early days at Ferrari quickly turned into a nerve-racking wait. For all the intrigue provided by pre-season testing, the definitive moment will be the Australian Grand Prix. From the Melbourne weekend onwards, all speculation will be moot: the stopwatch, qualifying results, race pace and championship points will do the talking. The romanticism will fade into the background as a true picture emerges of what Hamilton can achieve with Ferrari, and what Ferrari can provide for Hamilton. »

Masters
HISTORIC RACING

THE MASTERS ARE BACK ON TRACK!

THE 2025 TOUR IS ON – SECURE YOUR ENTRY!

	EVENT	CIRCUIT	DATE	GRIDS
🇫🇷	GRAND PRIX DE FRANCE HISTORIQUE	PAUL RICARD, FR	25 – 27 APR	F1 MGC
🇩🇪	THE JIM CLARK REVIVAL	HOCKENHEIM, DE	9 – 11 MAY	F1 MEL GD & TC
🇬🇧	MASTERS HISTORIC FESTIVAL	BRANDS HATCH, GB	31 MAY – 1 JUN	F1 SC GTT GD TC F1'90
🇳🇱	HISTORIC GRAND PRIX	ZANDVOORT, NL	20 – 22 JUN	F1 SC MEL GTT GD & TC
🇩🇪	OLDTIMER GRAND PRIX	NÜRBURGRING, DE	1 – 3 AUG	F1 MGC
🇬🇧	SILVERSTONE FESTIVAL	SILVERSTONE, GB	22 – 24 AUG	F1 SC MGC MEL GTT GD TC
🇦🇪	MASTERS HISTORIC WEEKEND	DUBAI, AE	24 – 26 OCT	F1 SC MGC MEL & GTT GD & TC F1'90

	EVENT	CIRCUIT	DATE	GRIDS
🇦🇪	GULF HISTORIC (NON-POINTS SCORING ROUND)	ABU DHABI, AE	31 OCT – 2 NOV	F1 SC MGC MEL & GTT GD & TC F1'90

Dates and venues correct at time of going to press, however, Masters reserves the right to make changes to this calendar.

EVENT SERIES KEY

F1	Masters Racing Legends for 66/85 F1 Cars
SC	Masters Sports Car Legends
MGC	Masters Group C
MEL	Masters Endurance Legends
GTT	Masters GT Trophy
GD	Masters Gentlemen Drivers
TC	Masters Pre-66 Touring Cars
F1'90	Masters Demo Legends for 90s F1 Cars

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THE LECLERC-HAMILTON DYNAMIC

Beyond the technical details of the new car, one of the biggest questions is how Hamilton and Charles Leclerc will co-exist as team-mates. Personable though Leclerc is, he hasn't always got on easily with his opposite numbers. With Sebastian Vettel, growing rancour manifested itself in the form of collisions on track; with Carlos Sainz it was globally broadcast via splenetic team radio exchanges. More significantly in terms of championship outcomes, difference in driving styles has been an issue – particularly on the return of ground effect, when Ferrari struggled to build a car from which both drivers could extract maximum performance.

This topic surfaced immediately after Hamilton's deal with Ferrari was announced but is now at the forefront of conversation. The first interactions between the two have been very positive. Rumours following the Testing of Previous Cars (TPC) sessions – which both drivers completed at the Circuit de Catalunya – suggest that their driving styles are much more similar than has been the case for Ferrari drivers in previous years. "I've noticed that we have a very similar driving style," says Leclerc. "I think this will lead to similar requests for the car and engineers. That's my initial feeling, but we'll get confirmation in the first part of the season."

Ferrari team principal Fred Vasseur has been clear about his vision for the Hamilton-Leclerc partnership. "One of a driver's greatest skills is the ability to constantly improve," he points out, "and a good way to do that is by analysing their team-mate's performance, since they are the closest reference and you have access to their data. I'm not worried at all – we need this kind of positive competition if we want to succeed. We need both drivers to perform well, pushing each other in a healthy way. I'm sure that's what will happen."

There will be no differences within the team, but the two drivers are entering the 2025 season from different backgrounds. »

Leclerc reckons driving styles are very similar

TRIENITZ/GETTYIMAGES

Top: early indicators point to a positive relationship between the new Ferrari team-mates

FERRARI

HAMILTON'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Hamilton's speed is a given: he's statistically the most successful grand prix driver of all time. And yet a lingering unknown offers the potential to frustrate expectations: qualifying performance. Historically Hamilton is no slouch in qualifying but, in the ground-effect era, he has struggled to get the best out of a car over a single lap. The 19-5 head-to-head deficit to George Russell at Mercedes in qualifying during 2024 is a worrying statistic. Now, starting from Melbourne, Lewis will have one of the best qualifiers on the grid – if not *the* best – in the garage next door.

It will be crucial to see whether Hamilton's struggles over a single lap in 2024 were due to an imperfect match between the Mercedes W15's characteristics and his driving style. Last year, Mercedes trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin suggested that Hamilton had some difficulties managing brake locking, and slight oversteer when exiting corners – small details, but crucial when competing at the highest level.

There's no guarantee that Hamilton will encounter the same issues at Ferrari. The SF-25 could better suit his driving style – but he will still need to adapt quickly, especially to the Brembo brakes. Historically, he has preferred the feel and modulation offered by Carbone Industrie discs and pads.

Qualifying will be a crucial battleground for Hamilton. If he wants to compete on an equal footing with Leclerc, he cannot afford to start behind him consistently – especially after the progress made by Leclerc in 2024 in terms of race consistency and effectiveness. This is why, heading into the season, many predict Leclerc to have the upper hand, particularly if Ferrari produces a highly competitive car.

The Ferrari incumbent has made his intentions clear: "I'm aiming for the world championship." A bold statement, unlike anything he has ever expressed since joining Ferrari in 2019.

Single-lap struggles made races harder in 2024

ASENOV/GETTY IMAGES

INTEGRATION, NOT DISINTEGRATION

For Hamilton, integrating into the Ferrari team is just as important as his on-track performance. For now, he is the one on unfamiliar ground. "I'm in Charles's house," he offers, recognising Leclerc's deep-rooted presence within the team. To bridge the gap, Hamilton has already begun learning some Italian, essential for direct communication with Ferrari's mechanics even though English remains the official language on the radio.

His commitment was evident from his first official visit to Ferrari, where he personally shook hands with every employee at the Gestione Sportiva responsible for Ferrari's F1 programme. During the pre-season, Hamilton even stayed in a motorhome at the Fiorano circuit, where he will reside whenever he's working at Maranello. Additionally,

MASON/GETTY IMAGES

Above: adjusting to new car just part of Hamilton's challenge. Below left: greeting all F1 staff

he will have a home in Milan, just a two-hour drive from Ferrari's headquarters. "Everything here is within reach," Hamilton says. His mornings have included jogging sessions on the Fiorano track before seamlessly transitioning between meetings with the engine, chassis and aerodynamics departments.

In his first Ferrari press conference, Hamilton was reminded that Kimi Raikkonen and Fernando Alonso won on their Ferrari debuts, while Vettel took just two races to triumph. Hamilton acknowledges the weight of history and has attempted to manage expectations as diplomatically as possible; of course, as a highly competitive individual, he'll be determined to match these achievements.

"Those guys did an incredible job – I have massive respect for them," he says. "I know how much work goes into acclimatising to a new team, so their achievements are even more impressive than I had previously appreciated. Back in the day, I took six months to win my first race with Mercedes. Now, I can't say how long it will take with Ferrari, but I'm doing everything I can to be ready for race one."

FERRARI

Hamilton's challenge isn't just about learning new steering wheel controls. It's about adjusting to a car with different aerodynamics and a different power unit, and a completely new working environment. But, as a seven-time world champion, he has an edge over less experienced drivers making similar transitions.

Hamilton has sought to minimise the number of unfamiliar elements in his new world. He is maintaining a trusted inner circle around him, led by his closest confidant, Marc Hynes. Significantly, Angela Cullen, his former trainer, has rejoined his personal squad after their separation in early 2023, and was present at Hamilton's Fiorano test. He has also recruited a personal press representative, an Italian-born professional based in London, to his core support group.

The inescapable conclusion is that Hamilton has cannily assembled all the elements required to make this new chapter of his career a success. He is building an emotional connection with the fans already – bringing his mother and father to his first day at Maranello played supremely well – and is diligently making friends within the team, visiting the remotest corners of the Gestione Sportiva. It's what Michael Schumacher famously did when he arrived in Maranello.

The difference is that Schumacher was but a two-time champion when he donned *rosso corsa*. Hamilton is already a legend and expectations are building accordingly – not least for the man himself. At certain races last year he looked despondent, now he looks reanimated – a man who knows he's living his dream.

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Team by team

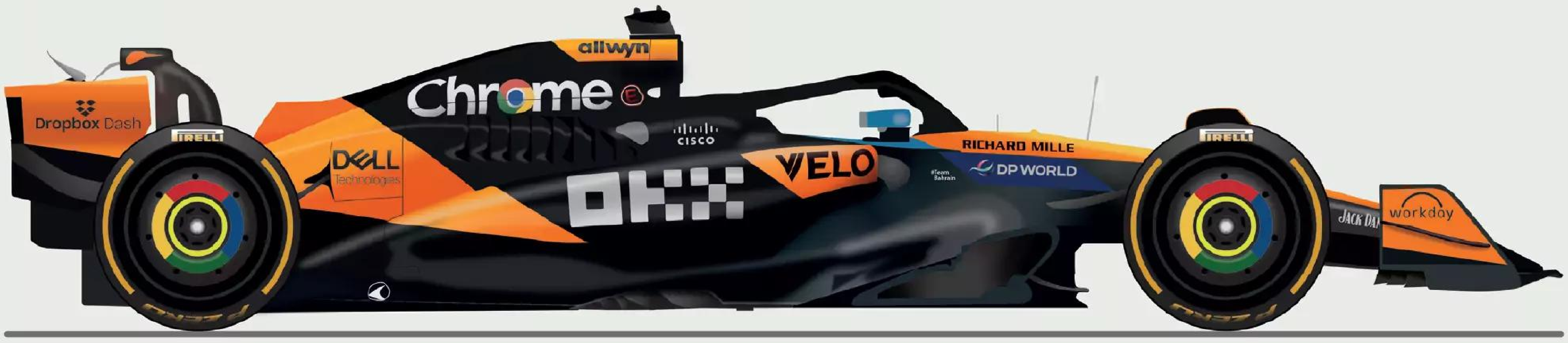
Autosport runs the rule over the teams and drivers of F1 2025

STUART CODLING

MASON/GETTY IMAGES

McLAREN

CAR MCL39 **ENGINE** MERCEDES M16 E PERFORMANCE



CALLUM TAYLOR

The Woking squad really got into its stride during 2024. Can it now use the experience to go one step further and fight for both championships this season?

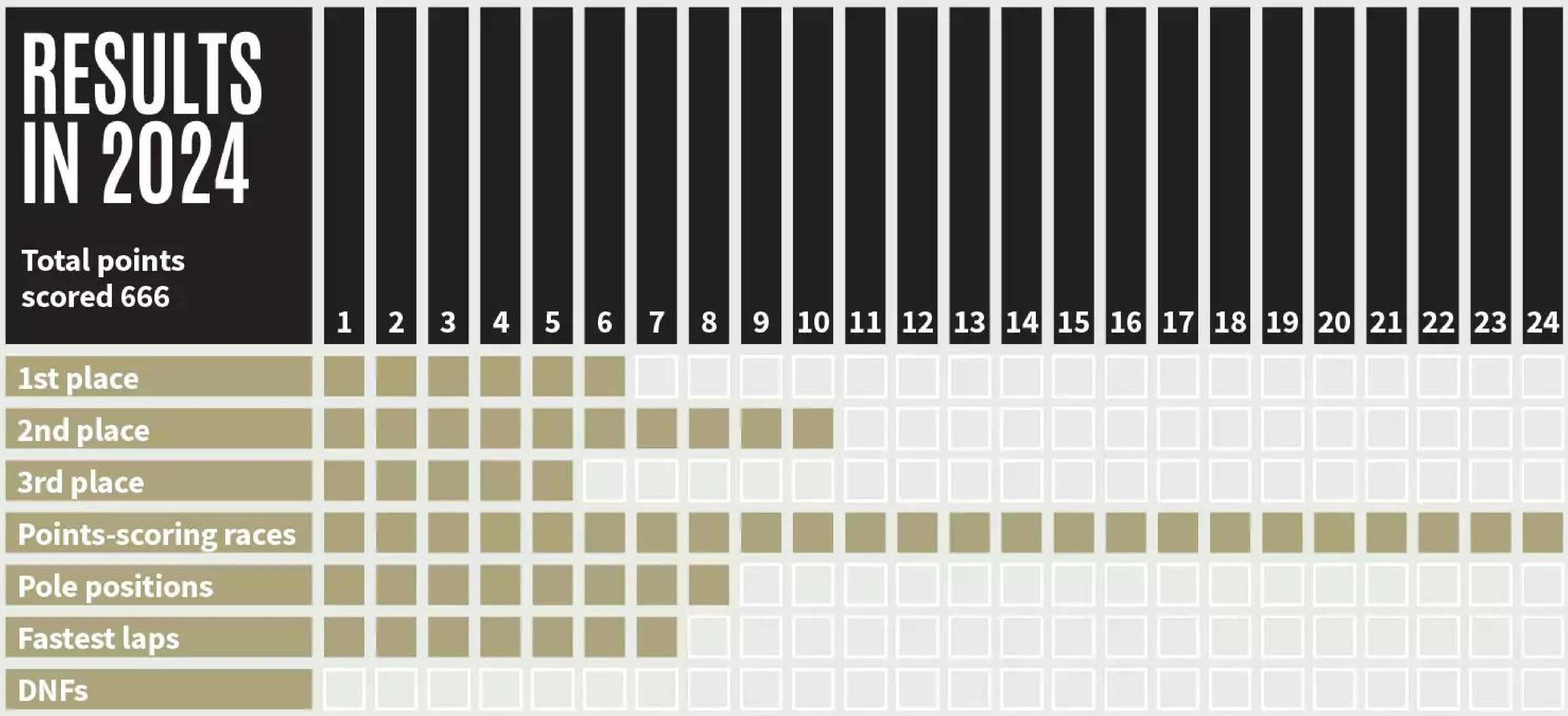
Indubitably 2024's Shoulda-Woulda-Coulda, despite winning the constructors' championship for the first time since 1998. Twelve months ago Red Bull opened the season with a seemingly ominous pair of 1-2 finishes; Ferrari was in relatively close attendance, McLaren only there or thereabouts until a major update package arrived in May. Thereafter both Red Bull and Ferrari found that performance upgrades made their cars peakier and less raceable, enabling McLaren and Lando Norris to launch title bids.

That was certainly welcome for a team that spent much of the past decade in perma-crisis, but this new-found ascendance came freighted with questions McLaren struggled to answer. How would the season have panned out if the car had been *that* competitive from the outset? In terms of the constructors' championship, it would have made the run-in less squeaky. It might also have left Norris with less to do in the closing rounds.

And on the subject of drivers, rather than the harsh-but-successful policy of having a clear number-two driver to run supporting lines for number one, allowing Norris and Oscar Piastri to fight among themselves – governed only by the cuddly-sounding but vague 'papaya rules' – didn't work. Piastri, fast and ambitious but on a different part of the learning curve to Norris, is a hot property McLaren is understandably keen to keep. Still, the team was slow to throw its weight behind Norris and squandered much of its mid-season advantage.

Operational misfires didn't help, such as the race strategy in Hungary that enabled Norris to undercut Piastri, thereby ensuring the internal tensions played out globally as Norris's engineer had to plead with him to hand the position back. The silliness arguably peaked at Monza, where Piastri not only barged past his team-mate to take the lead on the opening lap, but he caused Norris to fall behind ultimate winner Charles Leclerc.

After a succession of restructures and management changes, the current set-up is now relatively mature under the impressively steady hand of Andrea Stella. The benefits of that began to swim into focus during the Bahrain test. Momentum – or lack thereof – has been a problem before, but the new MCL39 seems to have carried speed from the previous car while arriving with evidence of some quite aggressive design choices. Competitors have been wondering whether the front suspension's anti-dive geometry is a step too far but, though Norris has suggested the front end is indeed quite pointy and the rear a little keen to step out, the MCL39's long-run pace in testing was impressive.



RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 666

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Pole positions	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

4

LANDO NORRIS

BORN	13 November 1999 (age 25)
DEBUT	Australia 2019
STARTS	128
WINS	4
OTHER PODIUMS	22
POLES	9
FASTEST LAPS	12
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	2nd
RACE ENGINEER	Will Joseph

Last year's championship runner-up looked relaxed enough when he sat next to Max Verstappen, a friend as well as a rival, and said the two had settled their differences via a bar-room brawl. But out-of-season chat is cheap and time has shown that Max has the edge on killer instinct.

There's no question about Norris's ability to wring maximum pace from the car while managing Pirelli's notoriously sensitive tyres perfectly. What's let him down in the past, arguably more so last year, is a tendency to make mistakes under pressure and then wear them heavily afterwards. Last season just slipped out of his grasp as he allowed Verstappen – and sometimes his team-mate – to bully him. His openness is endearing and has earned him a large Instagram following, but social media acolytes don't count for points.

81

OSCAR PIASTRI

BORN	6 April 2001 (age 23)
DEBUT	Bahrain 2023
STARTS	46
WINS	2
OTHER PODIUMS	8
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	3
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	4th
RACE ENGINEER	Tom Stallard

What some would call weaknesses, others would describe simply as things F1 rookies just have to learn to deal with through experience: tyre management, for instance. Whatever side of that semantic divide you fall upon, it's undeniable that in every passing season Piastri quietly but decisively erases those deficits. Last year showed he was getting there in terms of keeping the Pirellis sweet; what let him down was execution in qualifying, where Norris beat him 20-4. The field is so tight in modern F1 that you can't afford to give yourself too much to do on Sunday.

Piastri is a low-temperature character with an unflappable demeanour. Judging by the absence of histrionics on the radio, this laid-back approach prevails in the cockpit, too. But will this last if McLaren has to choose between its drivers?

ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

McLAREN AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Monaco 1966
Races started 970
Wins 189
Poles 164
Fastest laps 171
Drivers' titles 12
Constructors' titles 9

TEAM INFO

Base
Woking, UK

Website
mclaren.com

Social media
@McLarenF1

KEY PERSONNEL

Chairman/CEO
Zak Brown

Team principal
Andrea Stella

Technical director (aerodynamics)
Peter Prodromou

Technical director (engineering)
Neil Houldey

Technical director (performance)
Mark Temple

Chief designer
Rob Marshall

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 1st
2023 4th
2022 5th
2021 4th
2020 3rd

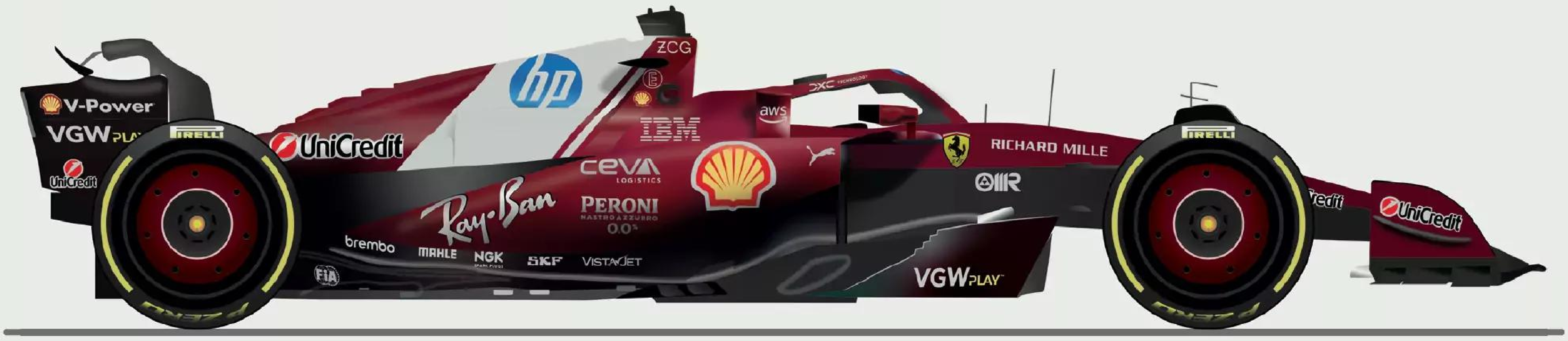
FAST FACT

26

Years between McLaren's eighth constructors' championship win and its ninth

FERRARI

CAR SF-25 ENGINE FERRARI 066/12



CALLUM TAYLOR

Management stability, better strategy and the experience of a seven-time world champion. F1's most famous team is surely getting closer to ending its title wait...

Maranello sucked in all the oxygen of publicity over the winter, thanks to the impending arrival of a certain seven-time world champion. And when Lewis Hamilton swept through the gates, exquisitely styled down to the toes of his red-soled Christian Louboutin boots, the moment did not disappoint. Those versed in assaying the value of social media posts duly reported the sound of virtual cash registers ringing as sponsors enjoyed the warm afterglow of the attention.

It would likely be for nought if Ferrari was in the grip of one of its periodic crises, but Hamilton seems to have chosen the right time to make his move. Ferrari's present management is smoothly carrying on the good work of its predecessors and car development is headed the right way, too. The SF-24 started last season strongly, had a wobble as performance upgrades made it unraceably peaky, then finished strongly enough for Ferrari to *almost* beat McLaren to the constructors' title. All good news for Hamilton who, having recently celebrated his 40th birthday, doesn't have time to sit around buffing those shoes while the team sorts itself out.

The key to last season's strong finish was a fruitful period of reflection in which Ferrari unpicked the development trajectory, got a handle on correlation, and shifted priorities away from outright pace. It was of little value, the engineers concluded, having a peaky car that was quick over a single lap if the driver knew their chance of holding on in the race was small.

As a result, the SF-24 had lower peak downforce than its Red Bull and McLaren rivals, creating a deficit through faster corners, although it performed better in slower areas. Perhaps that accounts for why the SF-25 has fewer visual continuities from its predecessor than most other cars on the grid, and why Ferrari has openly described it as "a completely new car". The most obvious change is the move to pullrod front suspension, enabling the wishbone geometry to offer more anti-dive.

At the rear end, Ferrari remains an outlier in having a pullrod set-up. Rather than follow the herd in this final year of the present regulations and adopt a pushrod set-up, it has stuck to its existing principles, but lowered the gearbox and the wishbones that mount to it.

During testing Ferrari seemed adrift from McLaren and Red Bull on overall pace during race simulations, and noticeably on straightline speed, but that could point to the use of conservative engine modes to avoid drawing too much attention.

Hamilton says the car gives him "the most positive feeling I've had for a long time". Given his value to F1's bottom line, that will come as great news to many.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 652

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□
Pole positions	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

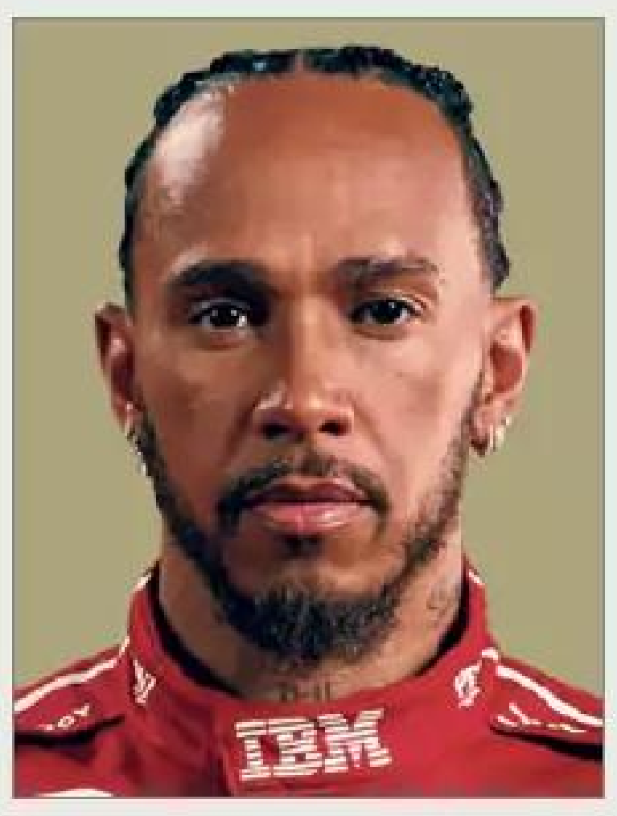
16

CHARLES LECLERC

BORN	16 October 1997 (age 27)
DEBUT	Australia 2018
STARTS	147
WINS	8
OTHER PODIUMS	35
POLES	26
FASTEST LAPS	10
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	3rd
RACE ENGINEER	Bryan Bozzi

A product of Ferrari's driver academy set-up and for many years the team's golden boy, Leclerc has had a particularly abrupt wake-up call with the high-salary signing of Lewis Hamilton and all its attendant showbiz trappings. Leclerc says the time out of the spotlight – relatively speaking – has enabled him to focus on himself and what he needs to do to be ready for the start of what will be a crucial season. He cannot allow himself to be outshone; it's one thing for the tifosi to transfer their affection, far more damaging for the team to pivot towards the other garage.

What Leclerc has on his side is years of insider knowledge, combined with fabulous speed. The latter comes into its own on Saturdays, for he is among F1's pre-eminent exponents of the quali lap – an area in which Hamilton has lacked of late.



44

LEWIS HAMILTON

BORN	7 January 1985 (age 40)
DEBUT	Australia 2007
STARTS	356
WINS	105
OTHER PODIUMS	97
POLES	104
FASTEST LAPS	67
TITLES	7 (2008, 2014-15, 2017-20)
2024 POSITION	7th
RACE ENGINEER	Riccardo Adami

There were those who said that Hamilton was merely cashing in on his status for one final big-money deal at Ferrari. They clearly underestimated him (as ever, seemingly), since he has arrived fizzing with a new energy, determined to do everything right. He's gathered a top-notch entourage including his old physio, Angela Cullen, and has begun the process of ingratiating himself diplomatically with the personnel at Maranello.

Pre-season, much of the talk has focused on whether he will get along with Ferrari's Brembo braking systems. In that regard he's maximised his chances of succeeding by putting in the hours in TPC tests and the simulator. He's the same fiercely competitive animal he ever was, and takes nothing for granted. But can he regain the qualifying mojo that's been absent during the ground-effect era?

GALLOWAY/GETTY IMAGES

FERRARI AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Monaco 1950
Races started 1098
Wins 248
Poles 253
Fastest laps 263
Drivers' titles 15
Constructors' titles 16

TEAM INFO

Base
Maranello, Italy

Website
ferrari.com

Social media
@ScuderiaFerrari

KEY PERSONNEL

CEO
John Elkann

Team principal
Fred Vasseur

Technical officer (chassis)
Loic Serra

Technical director (engine)
Enrico Gualtieri

Sporting director
Diego Ioverno

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 2nd
2023 3rd
2022 2nd
2021 3rd
2020 6th

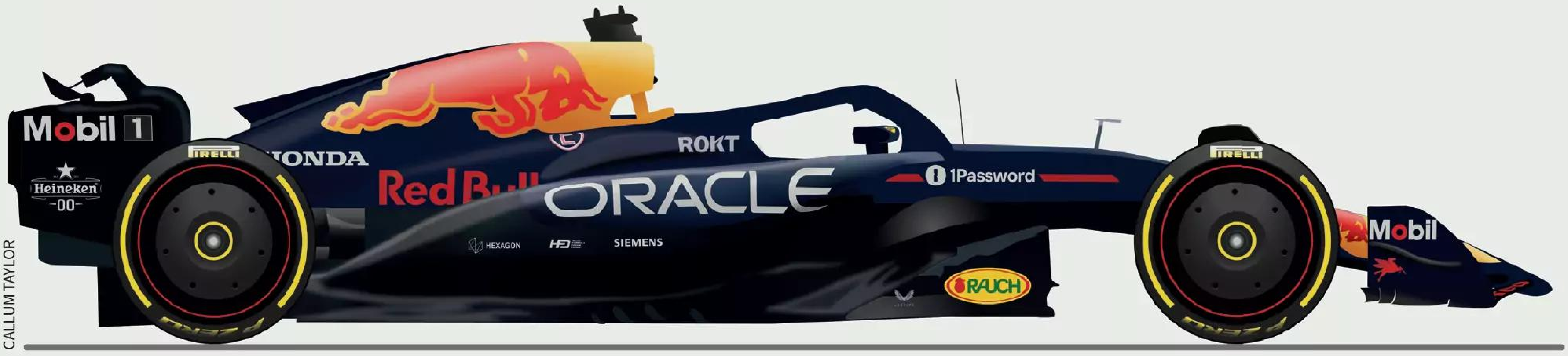
FAST FACT

7

Charles Leclerc will be only the seventh team-mate for Lewis Hamilton in his 19 F1 seasons

RED BULL

CAR RB21 **ENGINE** HONDA RBPTH002



CALLUM TAYLOR

Do the troubles of 2024 merely constitute a brief wobble for the ground-effect pacesetter, or the beginning of a longer-term Red Bull downturn that will frustrate Verstappen?

Some will have been relieved to see Red Bull's grip on both world championships slacken after a dominant showing in the first two seasons of the ground-effect era, particularly the near-full house of wins in 2023. The fact that he and his equipe aren't universally loved seemed to come as a surprise to team boss Christian Horner when he was jeered by the crowd at the F175 event in London. Still, his whip-crack response – passive-aggressively guilt-tripping them into silence – was demonstrative of the inner steel that has helped him keep Red Bull Racing together over the past 12 months.

While Max Verstappen leading 1-2 finishes in the opening rounds of 2024 promised more of the same, off-track revelations surrounding the treatment of a female employee, along with the distribution of a tranche of WhatsApp screengrabs via Google Drive, turned the spotlight on tensions within the team. Specifically, on factional infighting following the death of Red Bull magnate Dietrich Mateschitz in late 2022.

No less an eminence than tech guru Adrian Newey took this as his cue to leave although, gardening leave being what it is, he has only recently taken up residence in his new office at Aston Martin. The coincident timing between trouble at t' mill, Newey handing in his notice, and the hitherto dominant RB20 suddenly becoming bothersome led to inevitable speculation of a causal link between these events. Difficult to design and operate a successful F1 car when life at the office is like an episode of *Game of Thrones* but without the dragons and gratuitous nookie, went the thinking.

Ultimately, following a similar philosophy to Ferrari – unpicking the upgrade path to an extent, and making the car less peaky – helped reduce the RB20's tendency to undergo mid-corner balance shifts so discombobulating that even a driver of Verstappen's talent could barely hang onto it. The team then had its proverbial cake and ate it by firing Sergio Perez, whose chief sin was seemingly to not be able to hang on, though his deficit to Verstappen was big.

In comes Liam Lawson, a young man with very few grands prix under his belt but with the "mental toughness" (according to driver advisor Helmut Marko) to deal with what's coming his way. And what might that be? Difficult to say, since Red Bull had an occasionally troubled pre-season test in Bahrain marked by long spells in the garage. Verstappen appeared to not even do a race simulation, and was clearly wrestling with aberrant handling on the final afternoon.

"It can't be worse than last year," he says. Read into that what you will...

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 589

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Pole positions	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

1

MAX VERSTAPPEN

BORN	30 September 1997 (age 27)
DEBUT	Australia 2015
STARTS	209
WINS	63
OTHER PODIUMS	49
POLES	40
FASTEST LAPS	33
TITLES	4 (2021-24)
2024 POSITION	1st
RACE ENGINEER	Gianpiero Lambiase

Probably the greatest competitive force in F1, Verstappen is also undoubtedly the most polarising. Equally robust off the track as he is on it, he has his loyalists… and a substantial army of haters. Part of the reason for this being an issue, of course, is his success: Verstappen is a rapacious competitor who asks for, and gives, no quarter while being spellbindingly fast. Last year he demonstrated that he can take the world championship in a car so wayward that it kept spitting his team-mate into the wall.

While it's easy to grumble about his occasionally questionable driving tactics, what makes Verstappen magic is his ability to be quick while being on top of the tiniest details. Take last year in Qatar, when he spotted that Lando Norris – behind him! – had failed to lift for a yellow flag.

30

LIAM LAWSON

BORN	11 February 2002 (age 23)
DEBUT	Netherlands 2023
STARTS	11
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	21st
RACE ENGINEER	Richard Wood

Three tenths. In few other walks of life can two such innocuous-sounding words mask so much implied threat. For despite talk of the team trying to "ease him in gently" (according to team boss Christian Horner), Lawson must meet expectations or face that moment when Horner or Helmut Marko step into the shoes of Alan Sugar and say, "You're fired". The expectation is that Lawson will be within three tenths of Verstappen per lap.

Lawson has been quick enough so far, and the no-nonsense Kiwi also exhibits a mental robustness that bears comparison with Verstappen himself. Among the other factors on his side are that Red Bull's leaders are relatively cool on Isack Hadjar and seem to have given up on Yuki Tsunoda. So unless things go very badly he won't be on the end of a Pierre Gasly-style rug-pull.

ORACLE
ORACLE
Bull

MASON/GETTYIMAGES

RED BULL AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Australia 2005
Races started 393
Wins 122
Poles 103
Fastest laps 99
Drivers' titles 8
Constructors' titles 6

TEAM INFO

Base
Milton Keynes, UK

Website
redbullracing.com

Social media
@redbullracing

KEY PERSONNEL

CEO
Oliver Mintzlaff

Team principal
Christian Horner

Technical director
Pierre Wache

Head of race engineering
Gianpiero Lambiase

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 3rd
2023 1st
2022 1st
2021 2nd
2020 2nd

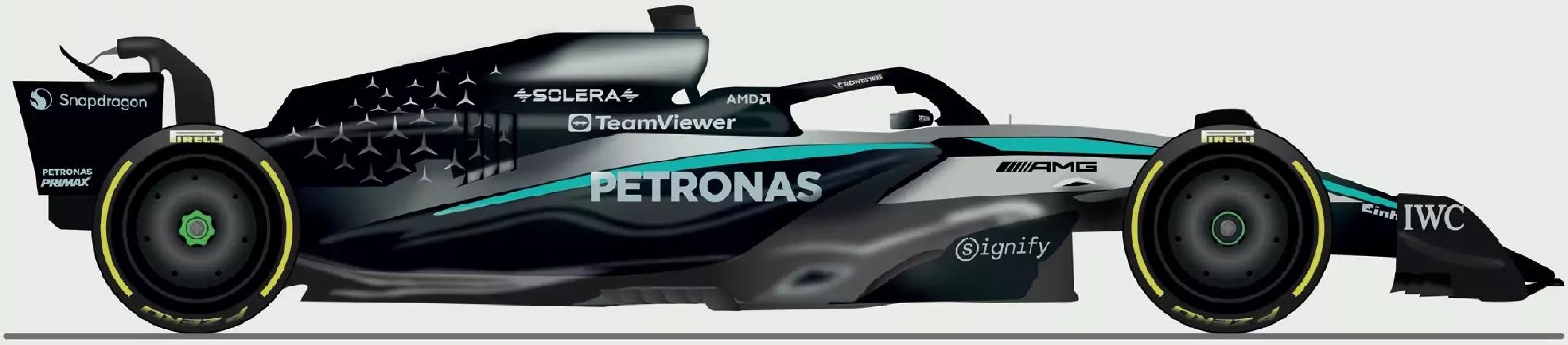
FAST FACT

69

Percentage of GPs Red Bull has won since the start of the ground-effect era in 2022

MERCEDES

CAR W16 ENGINE MERCEDES M16 E PERFORMANCE



CALLUM TAYLOR

Mercedes enters its first campaign without Lewis Hamilton since the Briton joined in 2013, but it does have two rising stars as the team attempts to get back to the front

Time was when Mercedes would sprint into the new season from a position of dominance and with a new car bristling with innovations that other teams, amid much grumbling, would be forced to copy or lobby to have banned. Since 2022 it's been more a case of wondering which catastrophe the team will blunder into next. Mercs in the ground-effect era have seldom been race-winningly quick, and have been generally difficult to drive.

It's not the case that Mercedes has 'forgotten' how to build a fast car, despite the inevitable brain drain that comes to successful teams when rivals poach their best talent. Rather it has pushed too hard and therefore, perhaps, suffered disproportionately from the variables lurking at the fringes of ground-effect science. It's learned the hard way, over three seasons, that chasing peak downforce results in a car that's both stiff and bouncy, and frustratingly difficult to set up in a way that optimises the front and rear at the same time.

Last season's W15 followed this template but was at least fast enough at times to win races, though it required special circumstances to do so. George Russell inherited Austrian Grand Prix victory when the leading duo contrived to collide, but Merc's wins in Belgium and Las Vegas were earned through pace since the car was at its best in cold conditions. Vegas was a 1-2 and Belgium would have been, too, but for Russell's disqualification on a post-race technicality.

Towards the end of the season Russell began to assert himself, both as team leader and a voice within the Grand Prix Drivers' Association, while Lewis Hamilton increasingly began to look like a man who couldn't wait to pack his bags for Maranello. His replacement, Andrea Kimi Antonelli, drew the eye during his maiden FP1 appearance at Monza by being searingly quick for a moment before binning the car. Fortunately he appears to have dialled down the exuberance since.

Given recent form, the team could be forgiven for approaching the coming season with some trepidation, but Mercedes enjoyed a very productive Bahrain test, completing the most laps – 458 – and seemingly encountering few problems. Russell's long runs were in the ballpark with Ferrari and Red Bull, if not quite at McLaren's level. The big unknown, though, is whether the unusually cold and often damp conditions in the desert were flattering the new W16's characteristics in the way they used to bring out the best in the W15.

That question will be answered presently, unless autumnal gloom comes early to Melbourne.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 468

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□
Pole positions	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

12

ANDREA KIMI ANTONELLI

BORN	25 August 2006 (age 18)
DEBUT	Australia 2025
STARTS	0
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	6th in F2
RACE ENGINEER	Peter Bonnington

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff had long seen Antonelli as the prime candidate to slot into the team after Lewis Hamilton's departure, but he was forced to push the button at least a year early when the Brit decided to up sticks for Ferrari. Ultimately it was a trickier decision than it could have been, since Antonelli struggled through the early phase of last year to adapt to the new F2 car, (as did his Prema team, to be fair).

Once in an F1 car he's driven with bravura and confidence – perhaps a little too much. Still, he behaved himself in testing and is keen to manage expectations ahead of the new season. Tyre management is something he'll still be learning, as well as maximising the car in qualifying, so 2025 will be a personal development curve for him, but he'll probably be given the time to develop.

63

GEORGE RUSSELL

BORN	15 February 1998 (age 27)
DEBUT	Australia 2019
STARTS	128
WINS	3
OTHER PODIUMS	12
POLES	5
FASTEST LAPS	8
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	6th
RACE ENGINEER	Marcus Dudley

Still only 27 years old, Russell is now an elder statesman of F1 on account of his willingness to shoulder the responsibilities of leading the Grand Prix Drivers' Association and speak up over various matters. This has set him up in opposition to the FIA president over matters of governance, such as inconsistencies of stewarding and the revolving door in race control.

Last season Russell regularly outqualified his team-mate, a seven-time champion no less, and he took the chequered flag first on three occasions – although one of those wins was taken away when his car was discovered to be fractionally underweight. But there were unforced errors again, too, such as a dramatic qualifying crash in Australia that brought out a red flag; being armed with a less difficult car might help him iron these out.

MASON/GETTY IMAGES

MERCEDES AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut France 1954
Races started 317
Wins 129
Poles 141
Fastest laps 109
Drivers' titles 9
Constructors' titles 8

TEAM INFO

Base
Brackley, UK
Brixworth, UK

Website
mercedesamgf1.com

Social media
@MercedesAMGF1

KEY PERSONNEL

Team principal and CEO
Toto Wolff

Chief technical officer
James Allison

Sporting director
Ron Meadows

Chief engineer
Andrew Shovlin

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 4th
2023 2nd
2022 3rd
2021 1st
2020 1st

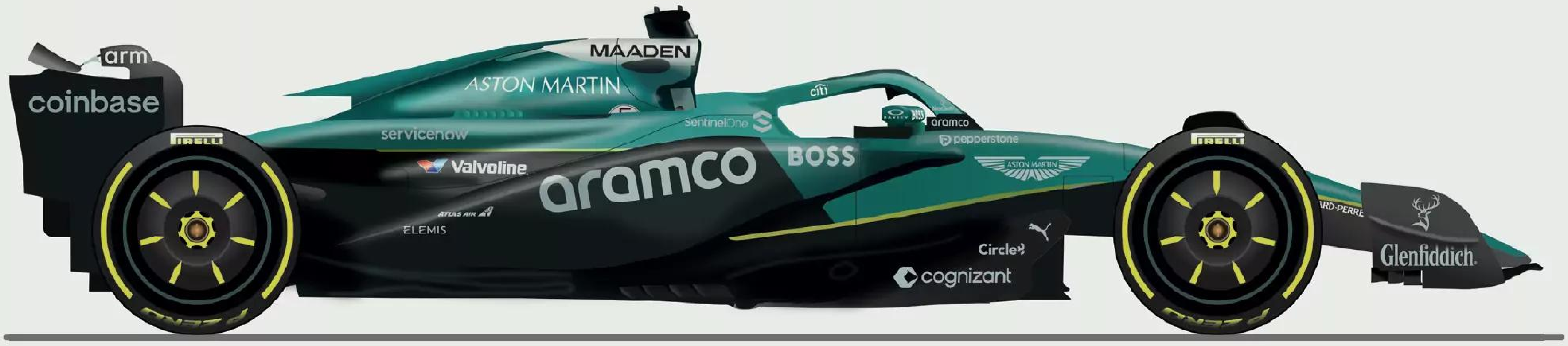
FAST FACT

25

Andrea Kimi Antonelli was just 25 days old when Lewis Hamilton participated in his first official F1 test in 2006

ASTON MARTIN

CAR AMR25 **ENGINE** MERCEDES M16 E PERFORMANCE



CALLUM TAYLOR

Aston Martin's big news last year was luring Adrian Newey away from Red Bull, but this season could be a quiet one ahead of a stronger push for F1's new era in 2026

Despite Lawrence Stroll's billions, and a bulging portfolio of high-value sponsors, Aston Martin remains a listless presence in Formula 1's midfield. The team originally known as Jordan, then passed around like a tray of cakes between owners of differing appearance but sharing the character trait of not wanting to spend, used to make a virtue of making a little go a long way. Now it's making a lot more go not quite so far.

Arguably Aston Martin reached its competitive peak in the second year of the ground-effect era, when Fernando Alonso claimed eight podium finishes on the way to finishing fourth in the drivers' championship. But the signs of its present malaise were already hiding in plain sight as the team struggled to add performance to the car through the year.

Arguably the closest Alonso got to a podium last season was his fifth place in Saudi Arabia, and at times the Aston Martin drivers made heavy weather even of getting out of Q1. Running the two cars in different specs for back-to-back evaluation was the giveaway that developments weren't having the expected results. Billionaires aren't known for their patience, and before long Stroll had one hand on his chequebook and another one on the lever actuating the trapdoor leading to the pool full of piranhas.

Stroll won the race to sign Adrian Newey – or did other interested parties think the price was being driven too high? Newey's price supposedly included the head of CEO Martin Whitmarsh – bad blood from their McLaren days – so a new leader was headhunted in the form of ex-Mercedes powertrains chief Andy Cowell. Technical director Dan Fallows, recruited from Red Bull just two years earlier, was sent on his way in late autumn and, over the winter, a new management structure was announced in which Cowell added the job of team principal to his remit. Hopefully the business cards hadn't already been printed. Erstwhile TP Mike Krack was 're-moted' to a trackside performance role.

While the new AMR25 didn't accomplish a great deal of running in the pre-season test, it at least looked more benign than its predecessor. Newey didn't officially start work until the Monday after it was packed up for its trip to Melbourne. On previous form, don't expect him to invest too much time trying to silk-pursificate a troubled car in whose conception he wasn't involved. Likely he'll prefer to focus on a blank-sheet 2026 project, only swooping in to offer his thoughts on troubleshooting the AMR25 if Stroll thumps the desk with sufficient anger.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 94

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Pole positions	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

14

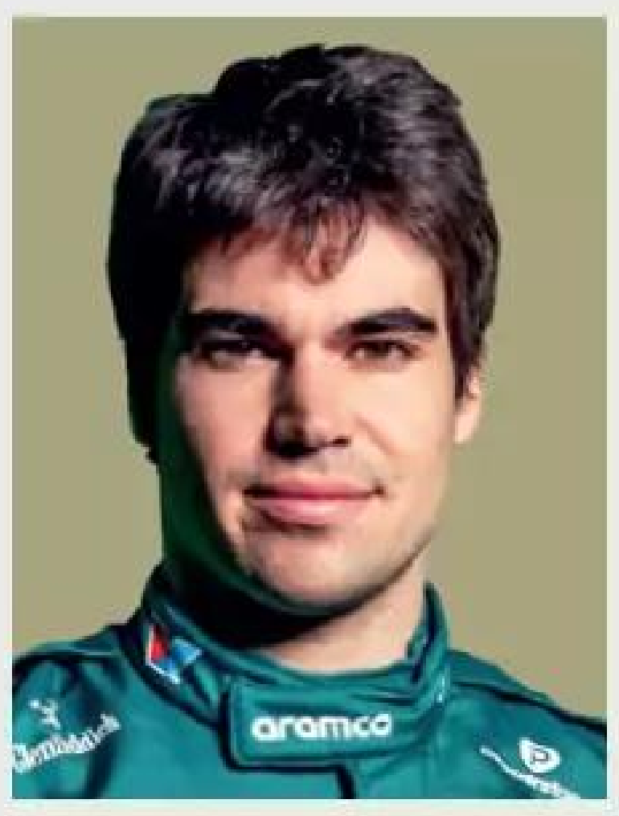
FERNANDO ALONSO

BORN	29 July 1981 (age 43)
DEBUT	Australia 2001
STARTS	401
WINS	32
OTHER PODIUMS	74
POLES	22
FASTEST LAPS	26
TITLES	2 (2005-06)
2024 POSITION	9th
RACE ENGINEER	Andrew Vizard

Aston Martin's greatest asset until it recruited Adrian Newey, Alonso has the occasional off-day – but he can be forgiven for that, given his 44th birthday approaches this summer. It's 20 years since he won the first of his two world titles and yet his competitive fire still rages.

Alonso isn't here to collect a salary, although there are signs he's now accepting the possibility that a third world championship is unlikely. Still, his contract runs to the end of 2026 so he may just be hoping that Newey can rattle something special off his easel next season. Until then he'll carry on wringing the neck of what he has.

Last year was best summed up by his Mexican Grand Prix weekend, where the team laid on various celebrations to mark his 400th 'appearance' – then his brakes failed 15 laps in.



18

LANCE STROLL

BORN	29 October 1998 (age 26)
DEBUT	Australia 2017
STARTS	166
WINS	0
PODIUMS	3
POLES	1
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	13th
RACE ENGINEER	Gary Gannon

The son of the team owner continues to present a baffling puzzle. Papa Stroll has invested a considerable sum over the years, facilitating his boy with the best equipment – including a team. And yet half the time Lance looks like he doesn't want to be there. If there was a championship for lack of enthusiasm, he'd have rather more trophies in his cabinet.

Stroll showed some promise of improvement at the beginning of last season, even pointing out to journalists that he and Alonso were 4-4 in qualifying. By the end of the season it was 19-5 in Alonso's favour. Stroll's year was perhaps best summed up by his absence from the Sao Paulo Grand Prix on account of him clumsily and inexplicably depositing his car in the gravel on the way to the grid.

FOX/GETTY IMAGES

ASTON MARTIN AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Netherlands 1959
Races started 95
Wins 0
Poles 0
Fastest laps 3
Drivers' titles 0
Constructors' titles 0

TEAM INFO

Base
Silverstone, UK

Website
astonmartinf1.com

Social media
@AstonMartinF1

KEY PERSONNEL

Team principal and CEO
Andy Cowell

Managing technical partner
Adrian Newey

Head of aerodynamics
Mark Gardiner

Chief trackside officer
Mike Krack

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 5th
2023 5th
2022 7th
2021 7th
2020 4th (as Racing Point)

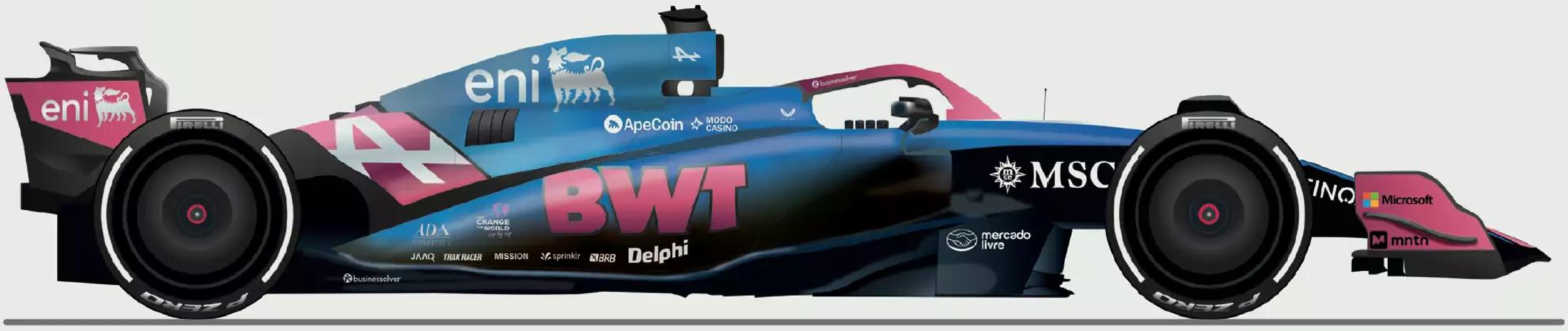
FAST FACT

3

Last year's Sao Paulo Grand Prix was the third time Lance Stroll has failed to start a GP having taken part in qualifying

ALPINE

CAR A525 ENGINE RENAULT E-TECH RE25



CALLUM TAYLOR

Have the tumultuous times at Alpine finally come to an end? The early signs are that the team will start this year in a better place than it did in 2024

Even before rebranding the team as Alpine, Renault had to make significant capital investments in its facilities to compensate for years of neglect at the hands of the previous owners. What it failed to do was install a revolving door, which would have come in handy as the hirings and firings have mounted up over the past few seasons.

Last year was a case in point. The exits of technical director Matt Harman and head of aerodynamics Dirk de Beer were announced the day after the Bahrain season opener, while hangdog 'interim team principal' Bruno Famin tried to blame his immediate predecessor, Otmar Szafnauer, for the farrago of the slow, overweight car. Those versed in how F1 actually works – not least Szafnauer himself, booted out the previous summer – rolled their eyes in response at such a feeble excuse. Ere long Famin was on his way too and it was the happiest he'd looked in a long time. Alpine brought back former Benetton/Renault boss Flavio Briatore as an 'executive adviser' and recruited Hitech supremo Oliver Oakes to run the team last summer.

This unlikely double act has presided over an uptick of form, although much of the legwork was already under way. The high-profile signing of David Sanchez, formerly of Ferrari and very briefly of McLaren, as executive technical director has also provided some cachet.

Nevertheless Alpine only finished sixth in the constructors' championship courtesy of Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly seizing the moment in the wet during an unpredictable Sao Paulo Grand Prix, a weekend where the team accrued more than half of the points it scored all year.

Briatore has never shied away from making big decisions; without wishing to pick at the scab of history, when last in charge of this team he ordered one driver to crash deliberately in Singapore so the other could win the race. Since Ocon was heading to Haas anyway, Briatore kicked him out one round early to put 2025 rookie Jack Doohan in the car in Abu Dhabi and gain some seat time.

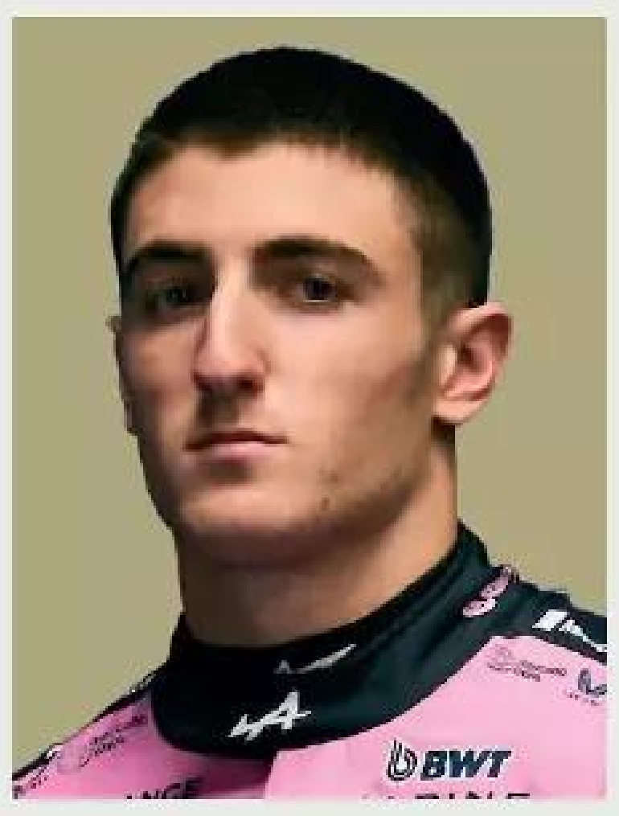
On the evidence of the pre-season test, Alpine heads to the opening race with greater cause for optimism than last year. It covered a respectable 405 laps, Doohan got plenty of seat time, and Gasly looked punchy during his performance running on the Friday afternoon. Autosport's trackside team reported that the new A525 looked a bit of a handful at times for both drivers, but a vast improvement on its predecessor at the same point last year. Alpine will be hoping that means it won't have to wait six race weekends to score a point this time around.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 65

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2nd place	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3rd place	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pole positions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fastest laps	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
DNFs	■	■	■	■	■	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

DRIVER LINE-UP



7

JACK DOOHAN

BORN	20 January 2003 (age 22)
DEBUT	Abu Dhabi 2024
STARTS	1
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	24th
RACE ENGINEER	Josh Peckett

Alpine has oft contrived to mishandle the young drivers coming through its academy, most notably Oscar Piastri, whom it failed to furnish with a role or a long-term contract in a fashion timely enough for the Aussie and his management. And now, having found a role for Doohan and promoted him into it, Alpine has seemingly done as much as it can to destabilise him – by hiring Franco Colapinto as reserve driver.

Having someone more experienced at F1 level waiting in the wings can't have done much for Doohan's confidence. Nor can the inevitable speculation, which team boss Oliver Oakes had the brass balls to blame entirely on the media. Dear fellow, read the room: Colapinto is Argentina's second most bankable sports star behind Lionel Messi. We wish Jack the best of luck.

10

PIERRE GASLY

BORN	7 February 1996 (age 29)
DEBUT	Malaysia 2017
STARTS	153
WINS	1
OTHER PODIUMS	4
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	3
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	10th
RACE ENGINEER	John Howard

During Gasly's all-too-brief tenure at Red Bull Racing, the team often wondered what was going on in his head. At the beginning of this year attention turned to what was going on *on* his head as the nattering classes began to speculate that his hairline had been augmented via transplant surgery over the winter. Such is the news agenda in the *Drive to Survive* era.

Gasly is experienced – and quick enough, given the right car, though this hasn't been the case for much of his career. His sole grand prix win came gift-wrapped through circumstance but he still had to work under pressure to get it over the line. He's sensible enough to be realistic about what Alpine can achieve, given the tightness of the midfield: fifth place, one spot higher than the team managed in 2024, is hardly a hair-raising prediction.

ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

ALPINE AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Britain 1977 (as Renault)
Races started 490
Wins 36
Poles 51
Fastest laps 34
Drivers' titles 2
Constructors' titles 2

TEAM INFO

Base
Enstone, UK
Viry, France

Website
alpine-cars.co.uk

Social media
@AlpineF1Team

KEY PERSONNEL

CEO
Philippe Krief

Team principal
Oliver Oakes

Executive technical director
David Sanchez

Technical director (engineering)
Joe Burnell

Technical director (performance)
Ciaron Pilbeam

Head of aerodynamics
David Wheater

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 6th
2023 6th
2022 4th
2021 5th
2020 5th (as Renault)

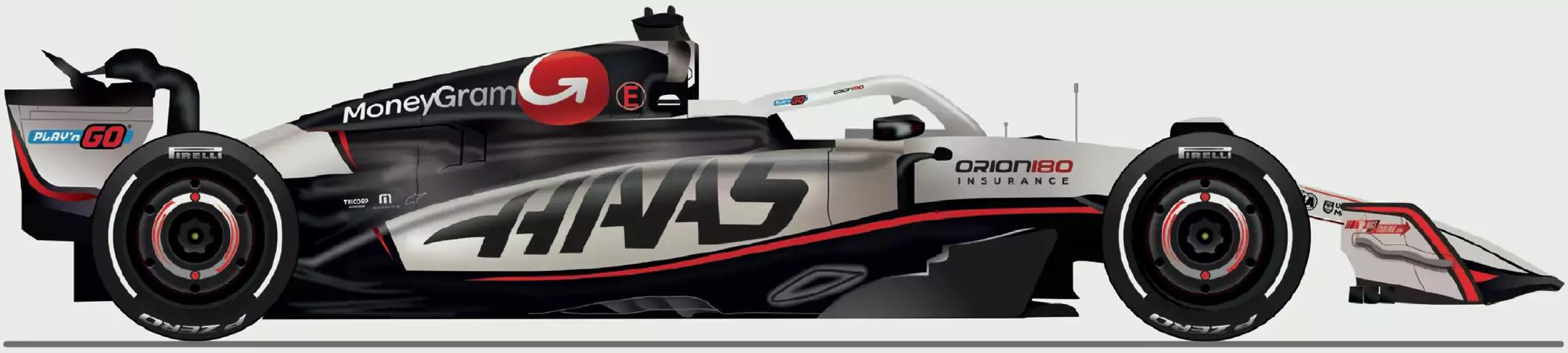
FAST FACT

33

Alpine took just over half of its 2024 points haul with second and third at Interlagos

HAAS

CAR VF-25 ENGINE FERRARI 066/12



CALLUM TAYLOR

Haas probably should have finished sixth in last year's constructors' championship, and the American squad has made changes to see if it can do just that in 2025

The statistics on the opposite page (bottom right) say much, but not everything, about the American-headquartered team's trajectory over the past two seasons: namely, a lot of bumping along the bottom, followed by a spike. But this wasn't quite spiky enough for new team boss Ayao Komatsu's liking: Haas should have finished sixth rather than seventh in 2024 and, as a result, the race operations side of the team has undergone a restructure to avoid the failures in execution that enabled Alpine to slip ahead in the final rounds.

Former operations manager Mark Lowe returns in the newly created sporting director role, RB strategy engineer Carine Cridelich joins as head of strategy, while Francesco Nenci takes another newly created role, that of chief race engineer. Nenci brings a wealth of experience, and has worked with Jules Bianchi at Marussia and Ralf Schumacher at Toyota, among others. Alongside the all-new driver line-up, the race engineers have been refreshed too, following Mark Slade's exit before the end of last season and Gary Gannon's move to Aston Martin. Laura Mueller, who will work with Esteban Ocon, is F1's first female race engineer.

The changes reflect the more methodological approach Komatsu has tried to instil since taking over from Guenther Steiner at the beginning of last season. Both are former engineers, but Steiner's reign was perhaps more notable for his splenetic, expletive-laden rants that the *Drive to Survive* programme-makers found irresistible. As such, Steiner acquired a larger profile than the boss of a back-of-the-grid team might otherwise merit. It's probably for the best that Haas now has a calmer and more understated figure at the helm.

New investment from Toyota enabled Haas to run under 'Testing of Previous Cars' protocols pre-season, which was not only useful in terms of giving Esteban Ocon and Ollie Bearman more seat time, but also provided an opportunity for the new trackside structure to gel ahead of the season. As car performance converges during this final year under the present regulations, the gaps in the midfield will get smaller and execution will be everything: Haas can ill afford another scenario such as the US GP where it squandered Kevin Magnussen's race with a needlessly early pitstop.

The VF-25 isn't especially daring in terms of mechanical choices – Haas retains the pushrod front suspension, for instance – but risks have been taken elsewhere. It's possible that the engine cover has been built too thinly to keep weight down; the team has now suffered two bodywork failures here.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 58

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Pole positions	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

31

ESTEBAN OCON

BORN	17 September 1996 (age 28)
DEBUT	Belgium 2016
STARTS	156
WINS	1
OTHER PODIUMS	3
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	1
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	14th
RACE ENGINEER	Laura Mueller

At the opposite end of the scale from the money-no-object career trajectory of Lance Stroll sits Ocon, whose family lived in a caravan and whose father rummaged through bins to liberate the expensive tyres used just once by his son's richer karting rivals. This peripatetic existence shaped him into the steely character he now is, albeit one who has acquired a reputation for not playing nicely with his team-mates if they're dicing for the same patch of asphalt real estate.

Like his erstwhile team-mate Pierre Gasly, Ocon owes his single career grand prix win to a gift of circumstance, though he made no fumbles under considerable pressure on his day of days. He'd had a special helmet designed to thank Alpine on his last grand prix for the team – only to be booted out before using it. He'll show 'em…

87

OLLIE BEARMAN

BORN	8 May 2005 (age 19)
DEBUT	Saudi Arabia 2024
STARTS	3
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	18th/12th in F2
RACE ENGINEER	Ronan O'Hare

It's not often that a British teenager generates as much excitement as 18-year-old Bearman did making his grand prix debut at the wheel of a Ferrari. Carlos Sainz's sudden appendicitis-related indisposition during the Saudi Arabian GP weekend opened the door for Bearman's cameo.

On a notoriously difficult circuit, Bearman only just missed out on Q3 and raced to seventh place. Despite a challenging F2 campaign, he'd done enough to earn a contract with Haas by summer, and was drafted in for Azerbaijan when Kevin Magnussen passed the penalty points threshold and was banned for a race. There he beat team-mate Nico Hulkenberg but his next race in the car, at Interlagos, was a more chastening and incident-packed affair in the wet. He'll need to show he's learned from that experience.

MASON/GETTYIMAGES

HAAS AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Australia 2016
Races started 190
Wins 0
Poles 1
Fastest laps 3
Drivers' titles 0
Constructors' titles 0

TEAM INFO

Base
Banbury, UK
Kannapolis, USA
Varano and Maranello, Italy

Website
haasf1team.com

Social media
@HaasF1Team

KEY PERSONNEL

Chairman
Gene Haas

Team principal
Ayao Komatsu

Technical director
Andrea De Zordo

Chief designer
Tom Coupland

Sporting director
Mark Lowe

Chief race engineer
Francesco Nenci

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 7th
2023 10th
2022 8th
2021 10th
2020 9th

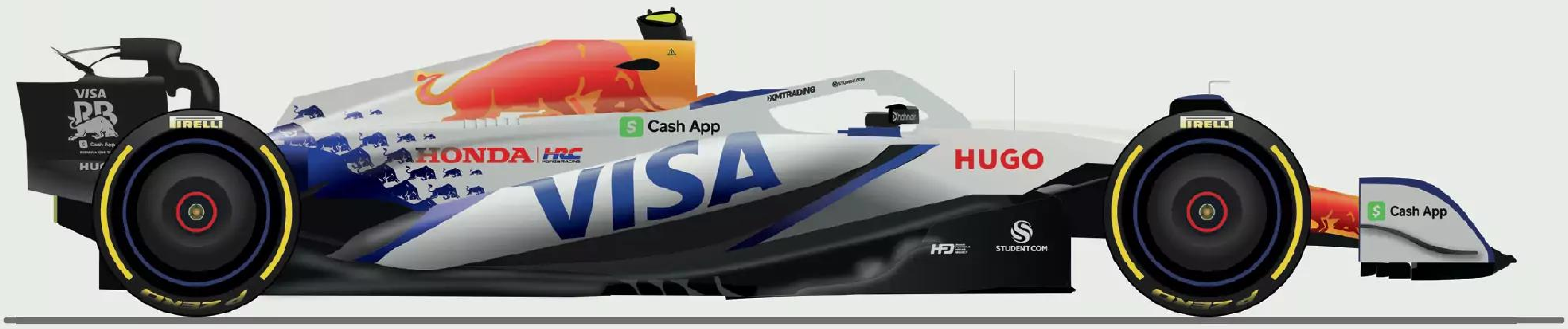
FAST FACT

8

Just eight different drivers have started full seasons for Haas since the team entered F1 in 2016

RACING BULLS

CAR VCARB 02 **ENGINE** HONDA RBPTH002



CALLUM TAYLOR

Is it Toro Rosso? Is it AlphaTauri? No, it's now Racing Bulls – and there are other changes behind the scenes that could impact the team's 2025 campaign

There certainly wasn't much compound interest in the joyless Visa Cash App RB monicker, so Red Bull's junior team has undergone yet another identity change ahead of this season. Clearly a change that makes sense on many fronts, because you wouldn't have described last year as contactless, either, after Yuki Tsunoda's 68*g* impact with the barriers during Hungary qualifying and his unfortunate first-lap retirement in Mexico.

Along with a minor adjustment to the name comes a change in livery and a welcome departure from the gloomy black palette that predominated in 2024. This is a team now trying – sometimes too hard – to present a 'fun' face to the outside world, a mission emphasised by CEO Peter Bayer at the F1 75 livery launch in London. What a shame he then lost the room by droning on about 'marketing platforms' as if he were at a corporate presentation where such empty jargon is welcomed.

At the beginning of January Racing Bulls' UK wing – the aerodynamics department – finally moved into new facilities in the Red Bull 'technology campus' in Milton Keynes. For the past 20 years it's been based in Bicester, in a hand-me-down 50% wind tunnel originally built by Reynard, then bought by Jaguar Racing in 2002 when Niki Lauda was in charge. A year later Jaguar added another tunnel to its portfolio when it took a 123-year lease on the former Royal Aircraft Establishment facility in Bedford, previously used by Arrows; when Red Bull bought Jaguar it used both for a time before handing Bicester to what was then known as Toro Rosso.

Beneath the new paint job, Racing Bulls appears to have followed a similar policy to Haas and focused efforts on aerodynamic optimisation rather than wholesale architectural changes. Inevitably the office relocation will provide some challenges and distractions at a time when the team is trying to pivot towards 2026 development, so upgrade packages may be infrequent.

At the Bahrain test there was some evidence to suggest that the team was running predominantly in very conservative engine modes, so lap times are likely to be not especially illustrative. But in the relatively rare moments where its drivers embarked on performance runs it did look somewhat disconnected between front and rear.

Rookie driver Isack Hadjar had plenty of seat time and completed a race simulation, which will be essential for his confidence since Red Bull's bigwigs already seem to have cooled on him and begun to view Arvid Lindblad as the man of the future.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 46

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
2nd place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
3rd place	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Pole positions	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Fastest laps	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
DNFs	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

DRIVER LINE-UP

6

ISACK HADJAR

BORN	28 September 2004 (age 20)
DEBUT	Australia 2025
STARTS	0
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	2nd in F2
RACE ENGINEER	Pierre Hamelin

Runner-up in Formula 2 to Gabriel Bortoleto, Hadjar will at least begin this season expecting to have Bortoleto behind him more often than not. Red Bull driver advisor Helmut Marko once talked up the Parisian as the “petit Prost”, but his enthusiasm has palpably cooled of late. Hadjar’s arrival at Racing Bulls was one of the final announcements of last year and done almost as an afterthought, though he was the most obvious candidate for the role.

In testing Hadjar got up to speed quickly and at times was throwing the VCARB 02 around as if it were a kart. Perhaps that’s not the fastest way to make progress in a ground-effect F1 car, but it showed confidence and a spark that’s occasionally been missing in this team’s second garage for the past few seasons.

22

YUKI TSUNODA

BORN	11 May 2000 (age 24)
DEBUT	Bahrain 2021
STARTS	87
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	1
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	12th
RACE ENGINEER	Ernesto Desiderio

“Yuki last year did a step I think none of us was expecting,” team boss Laurent Mekies said during the pre-season test, lauding Tsunoda’s greater speed, maturity and technical feedback. And yet none of it seemed to accomplish Tsunoda’s ambition, which is to get himself into a Red Bull seat. Since Liam Lawson has been ushered into that vacancy instead of him, we can reasonably conclude that moment has passed.

This being a historically unprecedented fifth consecutive season in Red Bull’s junior team, it’s unlikely Tsunoda will be part of the picture for much longer. To that end he’s dropped managers Mario Miyakawa and Luis Alvarez, replacing them with Mexican Diego Menchaca. Time for him to make his own luck rather than waiting on an organisation that’s clearly given up on him.

MAUGER/GETTY IMAGES

RACING BULLS AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Bahrain 2006 (as Toro Rosso)
Races started 375
Wins 2
Poles 1
Fastest laps 4
Drivers’ titles 0
Constructors’ titles 0

TEAM INFO

Base
Faenza, Italy

Website
visacashapprb.com

Social media
@visacashapprb

KEY PERSONNEL

CEO
Peter Bayer

Team principal
Laurent Mekies

Chief technical officer
Tim Goss

Technical director
Jody Egginton

Racing director
Alan Permane

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 8th (as RB)
2023 8th (as AlphaTauri)
2022 9th (as AlphaTauri)
2021 6th (as AlphaTauri)
2020 7th (as AlphaTauri)

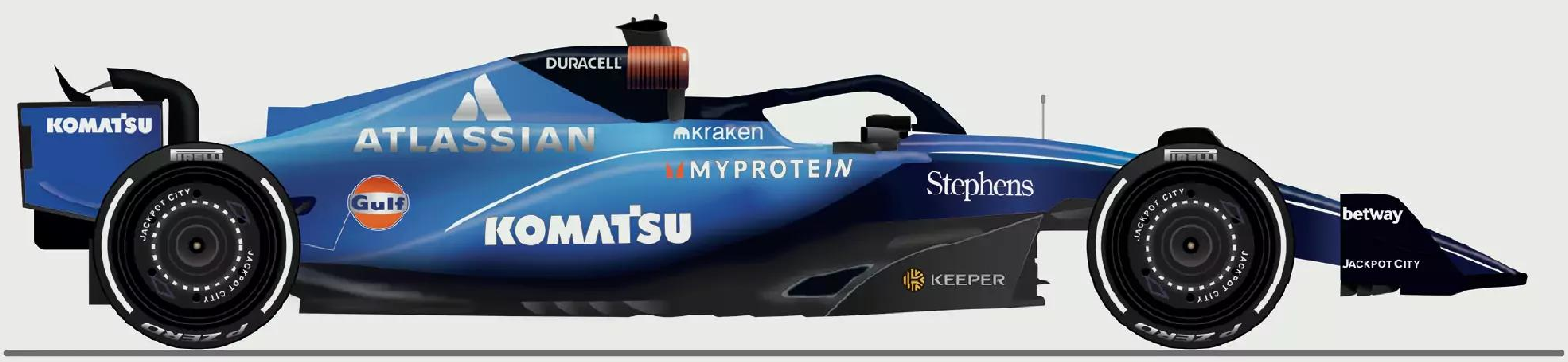
FAST FACT

4

Isack Hadjar will be the fourth French driver to race for the Red Bull junior team

WILLIAMS

CAR FW47 **ENGINE** MERCEDES M16 E PERFORMANCE



CALLUM TAYLOR

Plenty of new recruits – and not just the obvious one in the cockpit – indicate the famous British team has a new sense of belief and direction

That Formula 1 is a tough business can be illustrated by tracking the demeanour of Williams junior driver Logan Sargeant, who arrived at the beginning of the 2023 season veritably glowing with confidence and bravura. A little over 18 months later he cut a worn-out and demoralised figure, one who saw the coming axe almost as a blessing. Last month, on the cusp of his maiden appearance in the European Le Mans Series, it was announced he was "stepping away" from motor racing – in his absence, for he had already vanished, perhaps to a yoga retreat.

Williams, which sits fifth on F1's all-time wins list, is not a team satisfied with just turning up and occupying the back row of the grid. Its current owners have brought an ambition that had fizzled out – and a level of expectation that has already led to one round of bloodletting at senior level as erstwhile team principal Jost Capito was ushered out of the door, followed by technical director Francois-Xavier Demaison.

As such the excuses are running out. Last year's FW46 launched late and overweight, prompting team boss James Vowles to lament a production system in which components were tracked via a 20,000-cell Excel spreadsheet. This on top of various bits of factory hardware dating virtually to "the Ming dynasty". To get the car finished on time, various structural elements were formed in metal instead of carbon fibre, hence its weight and tendency to apparently disassemble at the slightest impact.

Last summer Williams announced a recruitment spree, which included ex-Red Bull composites engineer Steve Winstanley joining in a chief engineer role with a mandate to transform the structures department within the design office. Former Alpine technical director Matt Harman came in as design director along with a bevy of other hires from the likes of Red Bull and Ferrari. It was a sign not just of ambition but also that Williams is no longer a loser-brand team that can't attract serious talent.

As a man who came up through engineering and strategy roles, Vowles well knows the value of demonstrating power rather than just talking about it. As such, one of his team's key aims this winter was to launch the FW47 early, along with Williams's new title sponsor, at an event to which media and fans were invited as well as partners.

Williams followed up this show of force with a highly satisfactory three days in Bahrain, where new recruit Carlos Sainz set the fastest time of all during the three-day test. A climb up the pecking order is possible in 2025.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 17

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place																								
2nd place																								
3rd place																								
Points-scoring races	■	■	■	■	■																			
Pole positions																								
Fastest laps																								
DNFs	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■													

DRIVER LINE-UP

23

ALEX ALBON

BORN	23 March 1996 (age 28)
DEBUT	Australia 2019
STARTS	104
WINS	0
PODIUMS	2
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	16th
RACE ENGINEER	James Urwin

If Albon is at all discombobulated by the arrival of a grand prix winner in the garage next door rather than the procession of pay drivers/rookies that preceded him, he doesn't show it. Albon had a preview of the fickleness of the F1 world late last year when Franco Colapinto took over from Logan Sargeant and was briefly anointed as the next big thing… and within a handful of races Albon could still hold his head high as the Colapinto hype train derailed amid a rash of expensive accidents.

As he approaches his 29th birthday, Albon is in that sweet spot where he's confident and comfortable in his own skin, having weathered the battering his career received at Red Bull. If the FW47 is, as seems likely, among the fastest of the mid-pack cars, he'll be a frequent flier in Q3.

55

CARLOS SAINZ

BORN	1 September 1994 (age 30)
DEBUT	Australia 2015
STARTS	206
WINS	4
OTHER PODIUMS	23
POLES	6
FASTEST LAPS	4
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	5th
RACE ENGINEER	Gaetan Jego

It's well known that Sainz is one of the smartest (and indeed the smoothest) operators in F1. The fact that he's taken on a role with the Grand Prix Drivers' Association, and explained that now's the time to do it since he's unlikely to get involved in any of the spats at the front of the grid, shows the mental bandwidth he has available. He brings the same acuity to reading a race, as evinced by the occasions when he successfully overrode the Ferrari pitwall's bizarre strategic decisions.

That, and his race-winning pace, is what Williams wanted. McLaren has shown that it's possible to win the constructors' championship as an engine customer and that's where Williams wants to get to. Sainz brings experience from that environment as well, and this team can only benefit from another recruit who knows what winning looks like.

ATLASSIAN
MYPROTEIN
Stephens
betway
55

SBLOXHAM/GETTYIMAGES

WILLIAMS AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut Spain 1977
Races started 834
Wins 114
Poles 128
Fastest laps 133
Drivers' titles 7
Constructors' titles 9

TEAM INFO

Base
Grove, UK

Website
williamsf1.com

Social media
@WilliamsRacing

KEY PERSONNEL

Chairman/CEO
Matthew Savage

Team principal
James Vowles

Chief technical officer
Pat Fry

Sporting director
Sven Smeets

Chief engineer
Dave Robson

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 9th
2023 7th
2022 10th
2021 8th
2020 10th

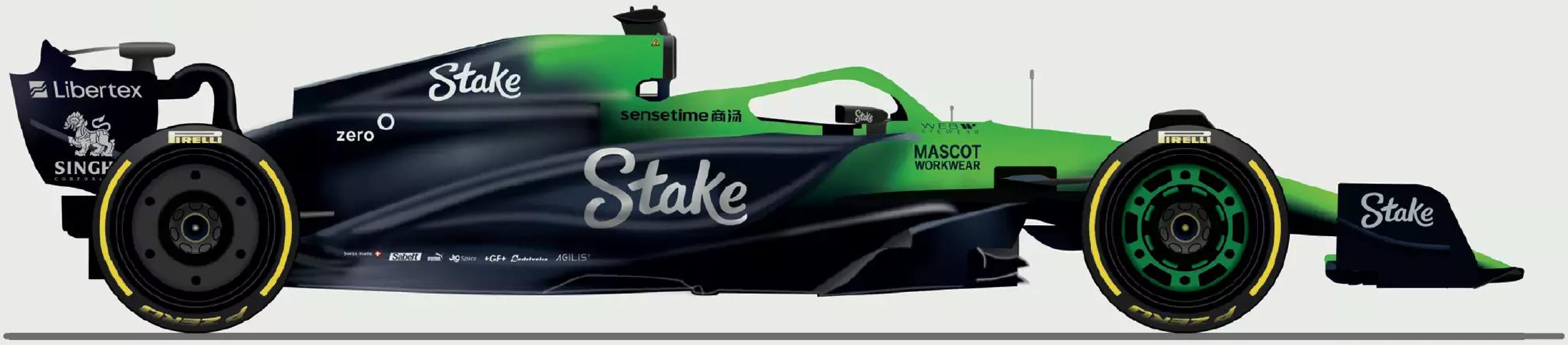
FAST FACT

2

Carlos Sainz is only the second Spanish driver to race for Williams – and Marc Gene only started three GPs for the team…

SAUBER

CAR C45 ENGINE FERRARI 066/12



CALLUM TAYLOR

With one more year to go before morphing into Audi, Sauber has a lot of work to do to get itself off the back of the grid after an almost point-less effort in 2024

Kick Sauber? Not when it's already down...

For many years the Swiss-based Sauber team was synonymous with a kind of studied Teutonic blandness (*surely not if you think of the C11?! - ed*), aptly summarised by its choice of the similarly poker-faced Nick Heidfeld as a driver during its brief period of BMW ownership. In the hands of a consortium led by Swedish Tetra Pak heir Finn Rausing, it somehow contrived to become even more anonymous, a status not helped by it being glued to the back end of the grid.

That status has gradually changed over the past few seasons as Alfa Romeo took title sponsorship and more Latin flair crept into the team's communications. In its most recent incarnation – a fluid affair in which the Kick video livestreaming platform alternates with the Stake online casino at the top of the bill, depending on local attitudes to gambling advertising – it has become positively cheeky.

Well, enjoy the last year of that as new owner Audi prepares to rebrand it with the four-ring logo from 2026 onwards. This is yet another interim season after boardroom ructions last year ended with Audi bigwigs saying a variant on "a plague on both your houses" and, instead of taking sides between quarrelling bosses Andreas Seidl and Oliver Hoffman, fired them both. Chief executive and chief technical officer is now Mattia Binotto, who did much to turn Ferrari around a few years ago before he fell foul of Maranello politics.

Shortly to arrive as team principal is Jonathan Wheatley, formerly sporting director of Red Bull. In that role he was viewed as having almost as much influence on the team's success as Adrian Newey, such was the alacrity with which he superintended trackside operations (particularly the crack pitcrew).

Last year was miserable for Sauber until the very end, when a new floor introduced a hitherto unseen level of speed and stability. Zhou Guanyu finished eighth in Qatar – and that was the team's only points finish of the season. Both Zhou and veteran Valtteri Bottas were let go, but their replacements stand little chance of improving on that showing unless the new car is a radical step better.

Initial impressions suggest that it isn't. The C45 – thankfully this 'tale of the tape' isn't going to reach C60 or C90 – looked quite funky in the launch renders but in real life seems as if the paint budget ran out earlier than expected. Bahrain testing pace was equally uninspiring, especially on the long runs, unless this was part of a concerted effort to go completely unnoticed.

RESULTS IN 2024

Total points scored 4

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
1st place																								
2nd place																								
3rd place																								
Points-scoring races	■																							
Pole positions																								
Fastest laps																								
DNFs	■	■	■	■																				

DRIVER LINE-UP

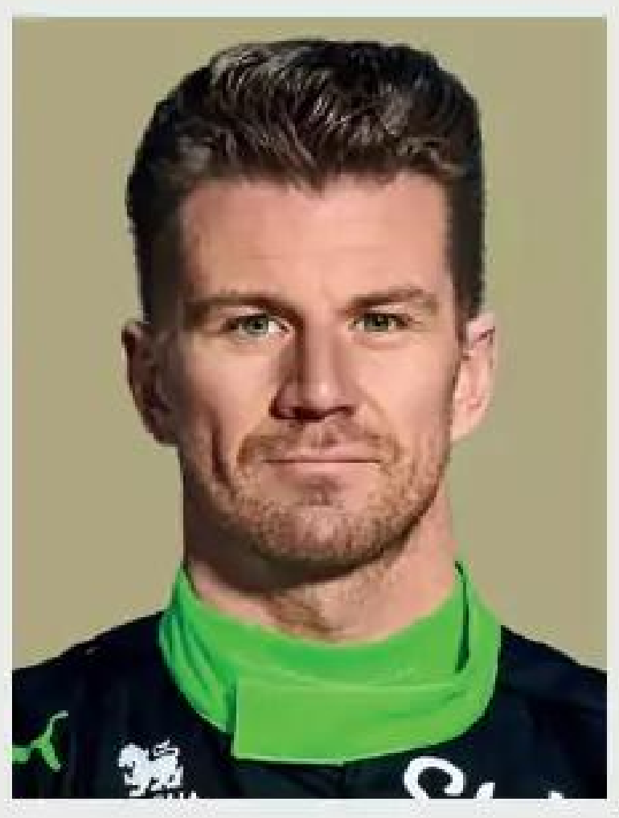
5

GABRIEL BORTOLETO

BORN	14 October 2004 (age 20)
DEBUT	Australia 2025
STARTS	0
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	0
FASTEST LAPS	0
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	1st in F2
RACE ENGINEER	Jose Manuel Lopez

Among the more exciting young talents to reach F1 in recent seasons, Bortoleto was a member of McLaren's young-driver programme – but his rapid ascent through the junior formulas rather caught the Woking posse out. He was pulling up stumps in Formula 2 all last year – his rookie season – and beat the more experienced Isack Hadjar to the championship. This slightly unexpected outcome left McLaren in a pickle because he couldn't do F2 again and his management – led by Fernando Alonso – was keen to see him in F1 as soon as possible. Cue Audi and its chequebook.

Bortoleto is indubitably a driver of the future but the question is whether his moment will pass, given that he'll struggle to make an impact in this year's Sauber and there could be more pain in 2026.



27

NICO HULKENBERG

BORN	19 August 1987 (age 37)
DEBUT	Bahrain 2010
STARTS	227
WINS	0
PODIUMS	0
POLES	1
FASTEST LAPS	2
TITLES	0
2024 POSITION	11th
RACE ENGINEER	Steven Petrik

Hulkenberg has driven for many teams during his F1 career – just not many of the better ones. The personable German is back for his second stint at Sauber having rediscovered his enjoyment of F1 at Haas after a three-season stint as Racing Point/Aston Martin reserve driver.

With Haas he carved out a reputation as a strong qualifier who brought focus and engineering rigour behind the scenes. He might now be wishing he'd stayed there because Sauber's new car doesn't look promising. When he signed up it was in the hope that he might at least bag a podium and put an end to *that* record (see right). Hopefully the splinter that landed in his eye on day one of the Bahrain test while mechanics cajoled some bodywork into shape with an angle grinder isn't an augury for the rest of his season.

ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

SAUBER AT A GLANCE

RACE INFO

Debut South Africa 1993
Races started 589
Wins 1
Poles 1
Fastest laps 7
Drivers' titles 0
Constructors' titles 0

TEAM INFO

Base
Hinwil, Switzerland

Website
stakef1team

Social media
@stakef1team

KEY PERSONNEL

Chief operating and chief technical officer
Mattia Binotto

Team principal
Jonathan Wheatley (starts 1 April)

Technical director
James Key

Chief engineer
Xevi Pujolar

LAST FIVE YEARS

2024 10th
2023 9th (as Alfa Romeo)
2022 6th (as Alfa Romeo)
2021 9th (as Alfa Romeo)
2020 8th (as Alfa Romeo)

FAST FACT

227

Nico Hulkenberg's least favourite statistic – he's started the most grands prix (227) without finishing on the podium

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SBLOXHAM/GETTYIMAGES

All the races

1 AUSTRALIAN GP
Melbourne
16 March
UK start time: 0400

2 CHINESE GP*
Shanghai
23 March
UK start time: 0700

3 JAPANESE GP
Suzuka
6 April
UK start time: 0600

4 BAHRAIN GP
Sakhir
13 April
UK start time: 1600

5 SAUDI ARABIAN GP
Jeddah
20 April
UK start time: 1800

6 MIAMI GP*
Miami
4 May
UK start time: 2100

7 EMILIA ROMAGNA GP
Imola
18 May
UK start time: 1400

8 MONACO GP
Monte Carlo
25 May
UK start time: 1400

9 SPANISH GP
Barcelona
1 June
UK start time: 1400

10 CANADIAN GP
Montreal
15 June
UK start time: 1900

11 AUSTRIAN GP
Red Bull Ring
29 June
UK start time: 1400

12 BRITISH GP
Silverstone
6 July
UK start time: 1500

13 BELGIAN GP*
Spa
27 July
UK start time: 1400

14 HUNGARIAN GP
Hungaroring
3 August
UK start time: 1400

15 DUTCH GP
Zandvoort
31 August
UK start time: 1400

16 ITALIAN GP
Monza
7 September
UK start time: 1400

17 AZERBAIJAN GP
Baku
21 September
UK start time: 1200

18 SINGAPORE GP
Marina Bay
5 October
UK start time: 1300

19 UNITED STATES GP*
Austin
19 October
UK start time: 2000

20 MEXICAN GP
Mexico City
26 October
UK start time: 2000

21 BRAZILIAN GP*
Interlagos
9 November
UK start time: 1700

22 LAS VEGAS GP
Las Vegas
22 November
UK start time: 0400 (Sun)

23 QATAR GP*
Lusail
30 November
UK start time: 1600

24 ABU DHABI GP
Yas Marina
7 December
UK start time: 1300

**Sprint weekend*

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x.com/autosport

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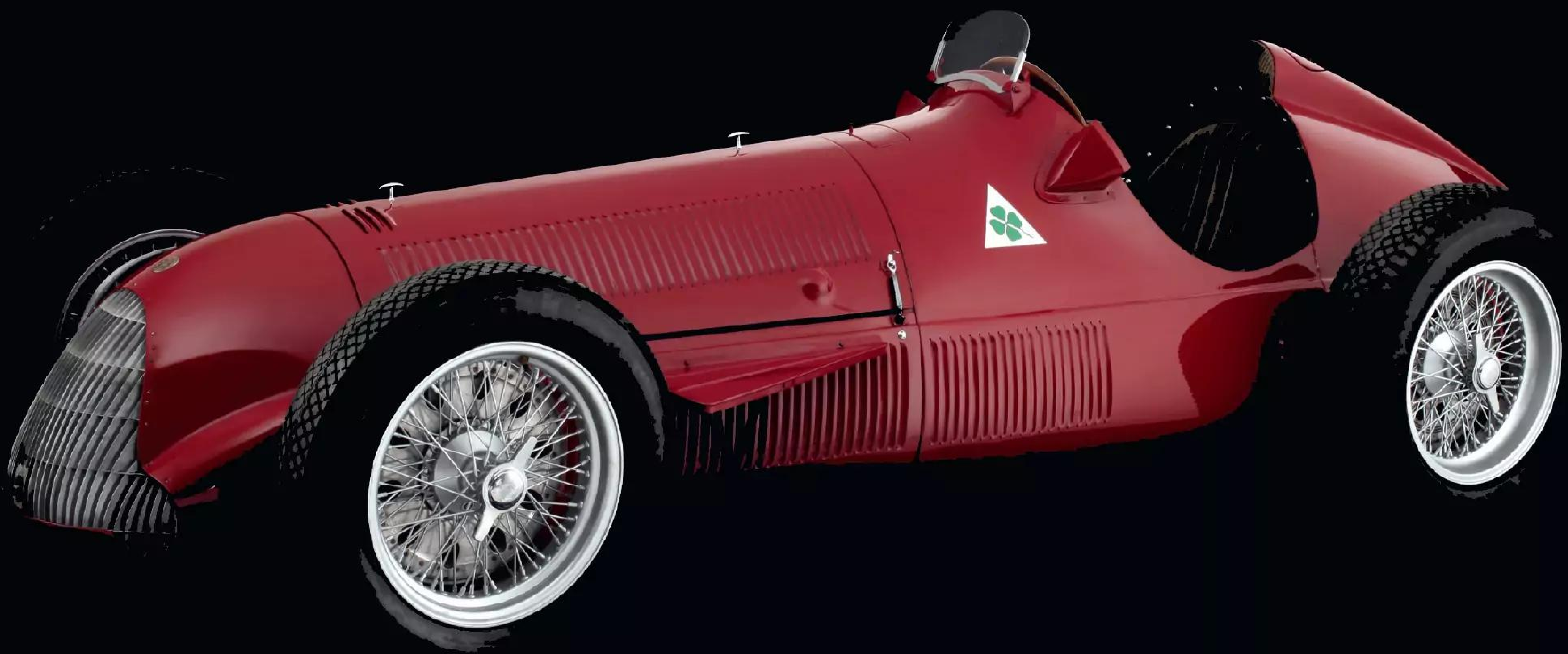

JAMES MANN

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

ALFA ROMEO 159
VS
FERRARI 375

In 1938, Alfa Romeo's 'voiturette' grand prix racer in effect cost Enzo Ferrari his job. Over a decade later, after he'd founded his own company, his past continued to bedevil him...

STUART CODLING

"Colombo! I'm tired of making machine tools. I want to go back to making race cars."

Whether or not Enzo Ferrari really summoned his old colleague Gioacchino Colombo to his Modena workshop in July 1945 and uttered these words no longer matters. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend – and this exchange is a pillar of the myth of the Ferrari marque's creation.

In the mid-1930s, Ferrari was operating Alfa Romeo's works racing team, albeit under the Scuderia Ferrari title, while Colombo was an assistant to the eminent Hungarian-born engineer Vittorio Jano, architect of Alfa's greatest grand prix cars. The sizeable challenge facing them was Nazi Germany's colossal investment in Mercedes' and Auto Union's grand prix programmes, co-opting motor racing as a propaganda project. Lap times were slashed and the Italian side, outspent but still carrying the weight of national expectations, collapsed into infighting.

Jano was dismissed, while Ferrari sought to circumvent inevitable defeat by directing Colombo to design a new car with a 1.5-litre supercharged engine to contest the 'voiturette' sub-class, thereby avoiding direct competition with the Germans even when they were sharing the same track. Nobody in the corridors of power was fooled and, since Alfa Romeo was government-owned, the dissatisfaction gained considerable momentum as it rolled downhill. During a rare moment of solvency, Alfa's managing director Ugo Gobbato bought Ferrari out in December 1937, renaming the team Alfa Corse and making it the bailiwick of Wilfredo Ricart, chief engineer of the 'special projects' department. Ferrari was now merely an employee, a fact brought home when trucks arrived in Modena the following January to collect the tools and components pertaining to the new Tipo 158 'Alfetta' voiturettes and transport them to Alfa Romeo's Portello facility.

While some scepticism remains over the supposed rivalry depicted in Ferrari's memoir *My Terrible Joys*, Enzo's nose was sufficiently put out by Ricart's presence, along with continued clashes with Gobbato, that the working arrangement lasted just 18 months.

"In the end I was sacked," Ferrari wrote, "which seemed to be the only logical solution to the situation that had developed. In 1939 came my divorce from Alfa Romeo. I sold the cars to Gobbato and he fired me. With the settlement after my 20 years, and with my savings, I transformed the Scuderia into a small car factory."

The onset of war then made the four-year non-compete clause of his deal irrelevant as Ferrari's workshop was co-opted into the war effort, while Ricart's ambitious grand prix car designs barely advanced beyond the prototype stage.

The 158 had shown encouraging pace in early voiturette races and the nine extant cars sat out the hostilities in pieces, hidden from the view of those who might loot or melt them down for munitions. But while motor racing began again remarkably quickly after the war – the Coupe des Prisonniers was held in the Bois de Boulogne just a week after Japan's

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NOW THAT WAS A RIVALRY

“WHILE HOLIDAYING WITH HIS FAMILY HE SAT UNDER A TREE AND SKETCHED OUT THE FIRST CONCEPT DRAWINGS FOR THE V12”

surrender in September 1945 – Alfa Romeo was in no position to return to the track at that point. The company’s association with the fascist government of a country that had then switched sides during the war was problematic; Gobbato was murdered by an employee on the day of Mussolini’s execution. Anyone with links to the fascist party was examined, so Colombo was undergoing what he described as “a temporary suspension, caused by political misunderstandings” when he received the unexpected call from Ferrari. Hastening from Milan to Modena, Colombo was welcomed with a minimum of ceremony. It was, he recalled, “as if he [Enzo] were just picking up a conversation where it had been left off”.

Ferrari wanted to know what configuration Colombo would choose for a 1.5-litre racing engine. Given that any competition in the immediate future would have to rely predominantly on cars that had survived the war, a formula based on voiturette principles was a relatively safe bet.

“Maserati has a first-class four-cylinder, the English have the six-cylinder ERA, and Alfa Romeo has the eight-cylinder,” Colombo replied. “In my view, you should be building a 12-cylinder.”

“My dear Colombo, you read my mind.”

Ferrari claimed to have a historic affinity for the music of a V12 but, given the scarcity of resources in the post-war period, he didn’t want the engineering to be overly elaborate. Merely to be contemplating such a project at a time when the echoes of bombs had barely faded was an act of huge ambition and bravado. Over a convivial luncheon the two men agreed a fee and Colombo departed, his head abuzz with ideas.

According to Colombo’s account, while holidaying with his family that August he sat under a tree and sketched out the first concept drawings for the V12: a 60-degree V angle, a single camshaft, one rocker gear per valve, one spark plug per cylinder mounted within the V. So far, so conventional. Unusual for the time – especially in the context of the ‘undersquare’ straight-eight Colombo had designed for the Tipo 158 – was the ‘oversquare’ bore/stroke of 58x52.5mm per cylinder, with a generous 90mm bore spacing to allow for enlarged displacements down the line.

Ferrari had spent part of his settlement from Alfa Romeo acquiring land for a new workshop in the small town of Maranello, south of Modena. Now he recruited talented engineers to assist the process of turning concept into reality: Colombo’s erstwhile colleague Angelo Nasi designed a five-speed transmission, while Giuseppe Busso and Aurelio Lampredi brought experience from the aero engine field.

Did word get around in the engineering community? Ferrari’s circumvention of his severance deal by building two race cars under the Auto Avio Costruzioni name in 1940 had not gone unnoticed. Perhaps Colombo was indeed exonerated; accounts differ but, by November 1945, he had been recalled by Alfa Romeo, leaving the “stubborn but competent” Busso as chief engineer.

Ferrari’s first V12 ran in September 1946 but it would be another four years – and a change of engine concept – before Enzo’s company would properly be able to stand toe-to-toe with his old employers at grand prix level.

Meanwhile, the re-established Alfa Corse returned to the field with a reconstituted fleet of 158s. After a low-key start – clutch issues eliminated Jean-Pierre Wimille and Giuseppe Farina in the Rene le Begue Cup that June – Alfa sent four cars to July’s high-profile Grand Prix des Nations event in Geneva. Two had been modified with two-stage Roots superchargers, taking power from 220bhp at 7500rpm to around 260bhp. They dominated both heats and finished 1-2-3 in the final, despite Maserati’s Tazio Nuvolari taking Wimille out with an egregious chop in heat two.

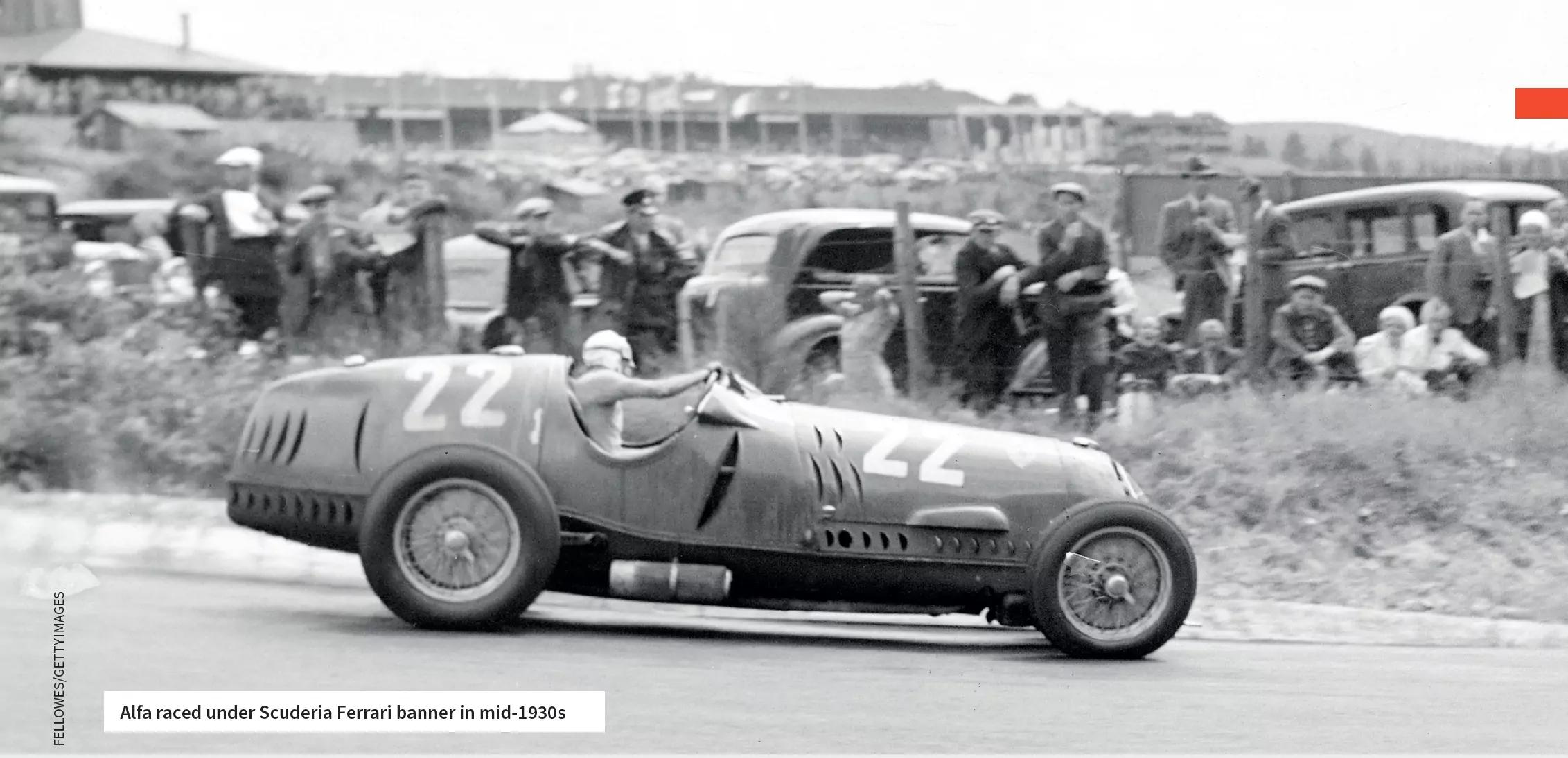
Further refinements for 1947, centring around a larger primary ‘blower’, brought power to 350bhp, and the bodywork was revised around a lower-riding chassis. The Alfetta now looked a very different car compared with its pre-war incarnation and dominated the majority of races for which it was entered; as predicted, ‘Formula A’, soon to morph into Formula 1 (the exact moment lost in a flurry of contradictory primary sources), adopted 1.5-litre supercharged and 4.5-litre naturally aspirated engines as its base.

In Maranello, development of the V12 continued to drag as Ferrari’s engineers struggled to achieve the crankshaft speeds required to unlock its potential. The figure of 72bhp at 5400rpm was quoted in the first sales brochure for the 125 Sport model, in which Franco Cortese made the new Ferrari company’s competitive debut at Piacenza in May 1947. While this kind of output was adequate for local events – Cortese was leading when his fuel pump broke, then won on the car’s next outing two weeks later – it was never going to cut it on the international stage.

Adopting better crankshaft-bearing materials would prove the solution to the problem – in theory. The British Vandervell company’s patented ‘thinwall’ bearings offered material technology unavailable in Italy at this time and enabled Ferrari to reach 7000rpm. Neverthless Busso fell out of favour with Enzo, who brought Colombo back as a freelance consultant in September 1947, prompting Busso to leave… for Alfa Romeo. The rivalry between Ferrari and his old employer was playing out in personnel movements even before they met on track.

Among Colombo’s first tasks was to complete work begun by Busso on a supercharged version of the V12 for grand prix racing – and a car in which to place it. The 125 F1, as it became known, had many mechanical similarities to the 158: both rode on transverse leaf springs at the front, with the rear wheels independently suspended via swinging axles. But the Ferrari’s 342mm shorter wheelbase promised greater agility.

In practice, the combination of narrow power band, short wheelbase and primitive suspension (independent movement with swing axles came at the cost of a high roll centre and substantial camber changes) was a recipe for »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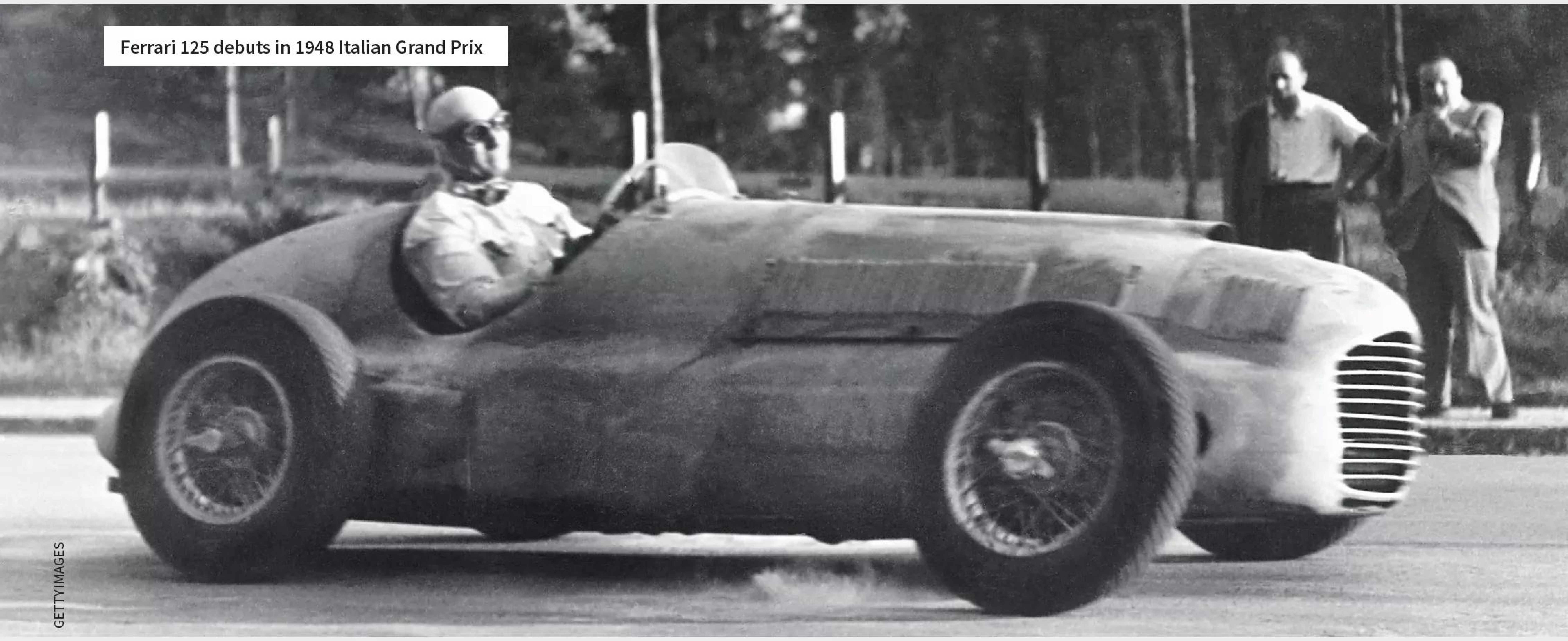
Alfa raced under Scuderia Ferrari banner in mid-1930s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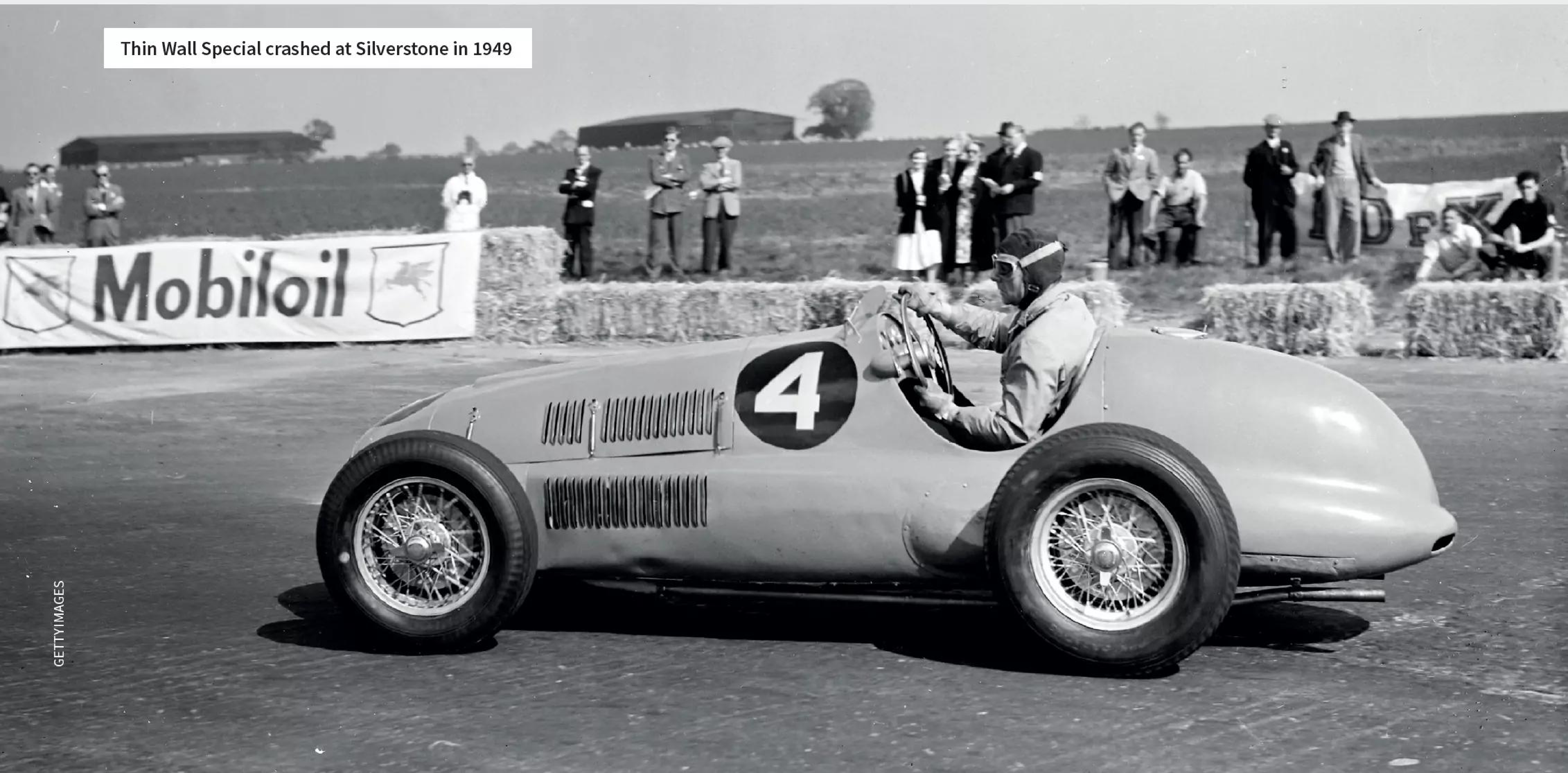
Ferrari 125 debuts in 1948 Italian Grand Prix



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Thin Wall Special crashed at Silverstone in 1949

Monza 1951: Alfa's Fangio, Farina, Bonetto, de Graffenried

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Fangio clinches 1951 title in Spanish GP at Pedralbes

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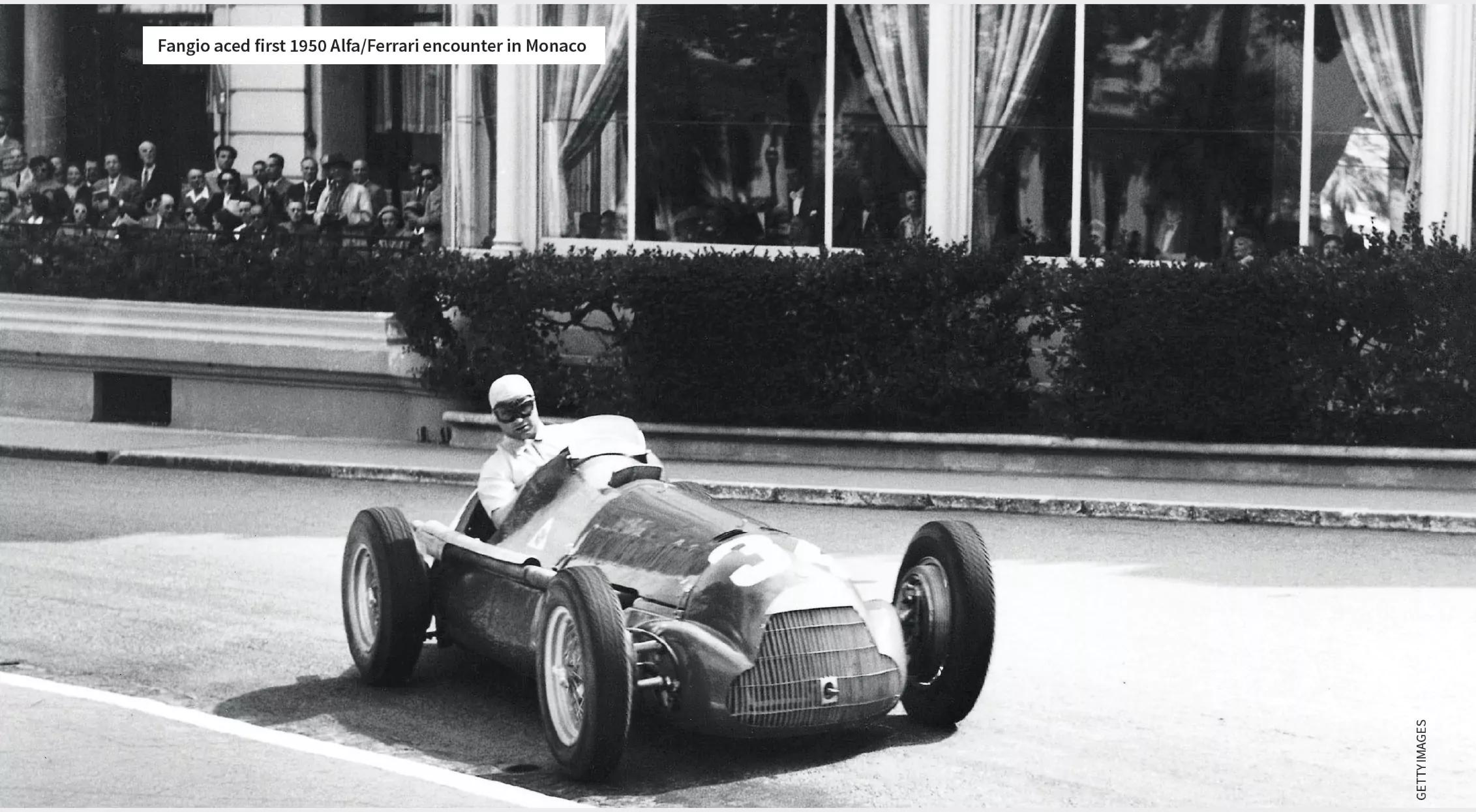
Fangio aced first 1950 Alfa/Ferrari encounter in Monaco

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Kimi Raikkonen gets 159 history lesson, Silverstone 2019

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> “ENGINEERS HAD NOTED A CATALOGUE OF HORRORS, INCLUDING SHODDILY FINISHED ENGINE INTERNALS AND OBVIOUSLY WELL-WORN COMPONENTS”

swapping ends unpredictably. Alfa Corse’s pre-eminence continued through 1948, weathering the loss of Achille Varzi in a fatal accident in practice for the Swiss Grand Prix. Maserati’s 4CL, another pre-war voiturette given new life through technical development, remained the car of choice for privateers in a field where other options were fairly limited. When the 125 F1 finally made its maiden competitive appearance in the Italian Grand Prix at Valentino Park in Turn that September, Raymond Sommer drove one to third place... two laps down on Wimille’s victorious Alfetta.

History has yet to alight on a definitive rationale for Alfa Corse’s withdrawal from racing in 1949, but the hiatus at least enabled Ferrari to win some races as the 125 F1 was improved with a two-stage supercharger and twin-cam heads, although lengthening the wheelbase by 160mm didn’t tame its wayward handling. Power was now 280bhp at 8000rpm but durability and the narrow power band remained problematic, an issue that would be brought to a head by a confrontation with a customer.

Enzo Ferrari was not a man who gave much concern to such matters, but this was no ordinary customer. Industrialist Guy Anthony ‘Tony’ Vandervell, whose bearings had spared Ferrari much embarrassment, was an early supporter of pre-war racer Raymond Mays’ British Racing Motors project. By 1949, frustrated with its lack of progress, Vandervell bought a short-wheelbase 125 F1 – thumping desks at the Board of Trade to secure an import licence for it – so BRM could see how a contemporary grand prix car worked. Mays raced it, painted green and entered as the Thin Wall Special, in the British Grand Prix at Silverstone – and was so exercised by its power delivery and snappy handling that he handed it over to Ken Richardson, who promptly crashed it. Vandervell returned the car to Ferrari, but not before his own engineers had stripped it down and noted a catalogue of horrors, including shoddily finished engine internals and obviously well-worn components.

The chastening encounter with Vandervell that followed was one of two pivotal events that year to shape Ferrari’s thinking. At the Belgian Grand Prix in June, the works 125 F1s of Luigi Villoresi and Alberto Ascari, and the private entry of Peter Whitehead, finished second, third and fourth to Louis Rosier’s palpably slower Talbot-Lago. Relatively ponderous as the T26C was, its 4.5-litre naturally aspirated six-cylinder engine was less thirsty, and Rosier gained track position when the supercharged cars stopped for fuel.

That summer, Ferrari accepted a proposal from Lampredi to design a new large-displacement V12, a decision that set in motion Colombo’s return to – where else? – Alfa Romeo. It never paid to burn bridges in the Italian engineering community – as Lampredi well knew, having already left Ferrari once after a personality clash with Busso and been personally recalled by Enzo once that engineer had been given the heave-ho.

While the ultimate destination of the new V12 was 4.5 litres, the journey involved two intermediate displacements because the existing drivetrain also required modification to accept the greater torque output. Lampredi followed many of the Colombo engine’s architectural principles, including the V angle and initial single-cam-per-bank layout, but specified a longer block with 108mm bore centres to allow for upscaling, and a thicker crankcase for superior durability.

Stage one was 3.3 litres, christened the 275 since that was the swept volume in cubic centimetres of a single cylinder. Two prototypes were ready by April 1950 and raced in the Mille Miglia sportscar enduro, but both cars failed to finish and Ferrari held off deploying the engine in grands prix, skipping the opening round of the new world championship at Silverstone to focus on preparing the supercharged cars for the more financially lucrative Monaco event.

Effectively this was a capitulation to inevitable defeat at the former aerodrome, though official accounts have it that Enzo was insufficiently tempted by the ‘starting money’ on offer. In March, Alfa Romeo had signalled its return, tempted by the marketing value of the world championship concept; scant weeks later, in grotty conditions at the Ospedaletti street circuit, a single Alfetta driven by Juan Manuel Fangio trounced a four-car Ferrari entry in the non-championship San Remo Grand Prix.

The deaths of Varzi, Wimille and Carlo Felice Trossi required a change of cast at Alfa Corse, and for 1950 the company fielded the fastest drivers it could afford: Farina, Fangio and Luigi Fagioli. For the British GP it diplomatically offered a fourth car to local favourite Reg Parnell. Ferrari’s absence was perhaps less of a bind for the patriotic crowd than the late withdrawal of BRM; it was a disappointment to which they would have to become accustomed.

Against a patchy field that included just one works Maserati, Alfa annexed the podium. Fourth-placed Yves Giraud-Cabantous was two laps down in his Talbot-Lago; Johnny Claes, 18 seconds off polesitter Farina’s pace in qualifying, was the final classified finisher, six laps behind.

Circumstances vindicated Ferrari’s decision to give Silverstone a miss, for in Monaco the race was thrown into chaos towards the end of the opening lap, when a freakishly large wave breached the balustrade at Tabac and flooded the road. Fangio scampered into a lead he would never give up as Farina spun, taking out eight other cars including team-mate Fagioli. Delayed by the aftermath of the carambolage, Ferrari’s Luigi Villoresi charged back into contention but retired; team-mate Alberto Ascari finished second to Fangio, albeit a lap down.

For the next European round, a thrash around the forest northwest of Bern, Switzerland, Villoresi’s Ferrari was modified to accommodate a de Dion tube set-up in place of the swing-axle rear suspension, but neither of the factory entries finished. Farina and Fagioli finished 1-2 for Alfa, the obligatory lap ahead of third-placed Rosier’s Talbot.

The Belgian Grand Prix represented a passing of the baton as Ferrari modified one of its existing cars to accommodate the 275 engine (make-do-and-mend ruled at Ferrari in »

“MIXED IN WITH THOSE TEARS OF ENTHUSIASM WERE TEARS OF PAIN BECAUSE THAT DAY, I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, ‘I’VE KILLED MY MOTHER’”

this era, so trying to apply modern car-naming conventions or track chassis numbers is an exercise in futility) and Lampredi’s new four-speed gearbox, built in one unit with the limited-slip differential. Qualifying was less than encouraging as Villoresi, in the supercharged Ferrari, was 10s slower around Spa than polesitter Farina and 5s faster than Ascari’s Lampredi-engined model. Still, Ascari made it to the finish in fifth, a lap down, while the supercharged V12’s final world championship outing in a factory car ended with Villoresi sixth amid a flurry of pitstops.

Midsummer brought another capitulation, this time at Reims, when the naturally aspirated Ferrari was so slow – relatively speaking – during practice that Enzo pulled his troops out of champagne country before race day, leaving stalwart privateer Peter Whitehead to fly the flag for Maranello. He was rewarded for his persistence with third place when Farina’s fuel pump broke nine laps from the chequered flag.

In the two-month gap before the final round at Monza, Lampredi’s interim 4.1-litre engine – the 340 – was deemed ready and given a run-out in the non-championship Grand Prix des Nations in Geneva. Ranged against four Alfa Romeos, Ascari was second-fastest in the larger-engined Ferrari to Fangio during practice, and ran second to him in the race, albeit with an ever-increasing gap. Villoresi was running fifth in his 275 until lap 60 of 68, when he hit a patch of oil at speed and spun so violently that he was thrown out of the car, which then careered into a spectator area. Two laps later Ascari trundled into the pits with an expired engine.

By September the definitive 4.5-litre 375 engine was ready, developing a claimed 350bhp at 6500rpm, and it was slotted into two chassis with the de Dion set-up and modified bodywork. Villoresi’s injuries were such that test driver Dorino Serafini had the honour of lining up at Monza alongside Ascari. Ferrari was outnumbered by Alfa Romeo’s four entries but, for the first time, not outgunned: Ascari qualified 0.2 hand-timed seconds off polesitter Fangio and disputed the early race lead with the fast-starting Farina. Engine failure on the 22nd lap entailed a walk back to the pits, but Ascari then took over Serafini’s car and steadily rose from sixth to second place despite a recalcitrant gearshift. The final result was perhaps flattered by two of the Alfas suffering mechanical trouble, and overshadowed by Farina being crowned the first world champion, but its significance registered loudly at Alfa Corse’s Portello works.

Over winter, engineering director Orazio Satta Puliga oversaw another major overhaul in which the 158 was rechristened the 159, four new cars were built with de Dion rear axles, and several existing cars modified. An even larger air scoop along the nose signified the presence of bigger superchargers; internally, the adoption of needle roller bearings enabled the engine to reach 10,500rpm, though drivers were instructed to keep this in their pockets for occasional use only. It could reliably produce 420bhp at 9500rpm but its prodigious thirst – 1.6mpg! – required larger fuel tanks, hence the internal paperwork referring to the 159s as *fianchi larghi* (‘wide hips’).

Lampredi revised Ferrari’s V12 with twin spark plugs per cylinder ahead of the first world championship race of 1951 but, despite this and improved brakes, it was close-but-no-cigar in the opening three European rounds. Still, a pattern was being established: Alfa winning but with a narrower margin, and fewer cars making it to the flag without incident. In Switzerland, Piero Taruffi brought his 375 home second to Fangio but ahead of world champion Farina; and in France, Alfa made Fagioli swap cars with Fangio to preserve the Argentinian’s championship position after Fangio’s car was delayed with magneto problems.

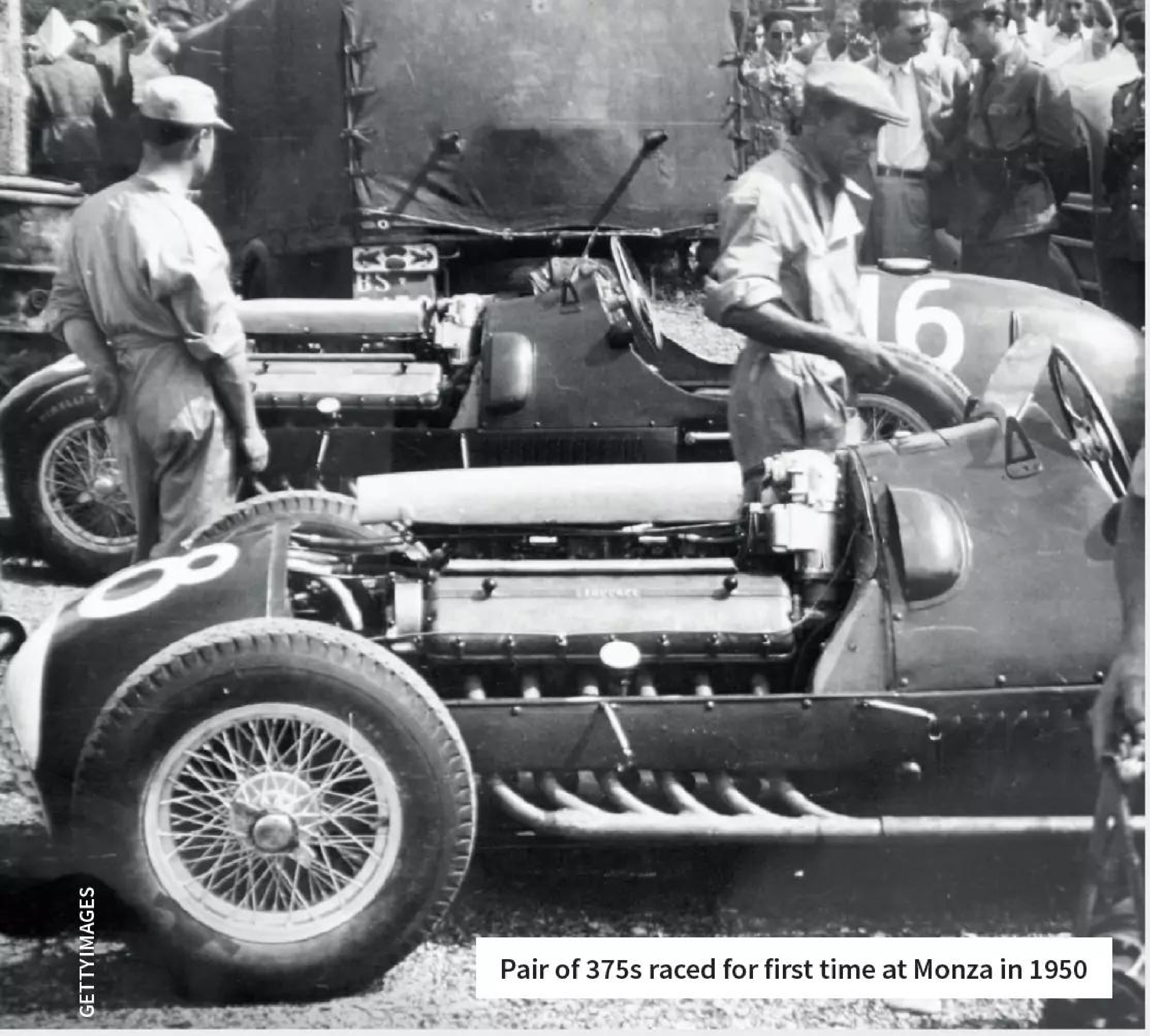
Silverstone, where Ferrari had avoided defeat a year earlier by not competing, would be the historic transition point. At Reims, Ferrari had entered a fourth car for Jose Froilan Gonzalez equipped with a second-string 12-plug engine; this was the 375 Ascari took over and drove to second place behind Fangio. Despite the inferior equipment, it was Gonzalez who starred at Silverstone, clocking the circuit’s first 100mph average lap in practice and setting pole position ahead of Fangio. Though both were beaten to the first corner by Fangio’s team-mate Felice Bonetto, Gonzalez briefly seized the lead before the Alfas’ power advantage told and he slipped back to third. Remarkably, the man who had been so nervous ahead of the start that an emergency toilet visit was required now entered a state of calm. He overtook Bonetto shortly after Fangio pitted on lap 38 of 100 and led again, ceding it only when he made his solitary stop on lap 48. When Fangio pitted again, Gonzalez led by over a minute – a margin that only shrank as he eased off to preserve his car in the closing laps.

“When Gonzalez and his Ferrari left the 159 and the entire Alfa team in his wake for the first time in the history of our direct clashes, I cried for joy,” Ferrari would later write in his memoir *Ferrari 80*. “But mixed in with those tears of enthusiasm were tears of pain because that day, I thought to myself, ‘I’ve killed my mother’.”

Alfa’s defeat resonated through the entire motor racing firmament. Back-to-back victories for Ascari at the Nurburgring and Monza not only confirmed the end of Alfa’s supremacy, but also elevated Ascari to the hitherto unexpected status of championship contender. Poor tyre choice by Ferrari in the final round at Pedralbes then proved decisive when its economy advantage was nullified by frequent pitstops to swap wheels.

After this, F1’s first great manufacturer rivalry came to a ragged and inconsequential termination. There would be no rematch in 1952: on 15 February Alfa Romeo’s management met and, in the absence of a government grant to build new cars, decided to withdraw. In the absence of serious competition, race organisers across Europe lobbied for F1 cars to be dropped from world championship rounds.

Enzo, who had a perfectly good Lampredi-designed F2 engine ready to run, could safely mop up any remaining tears of pain.



Pair of 375s raced for first time at Monza in 1950

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Ascari's Ferrari victorious in 1951 Italian GP

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Emotional maiden Ferrari victory, Silverstone 1951…

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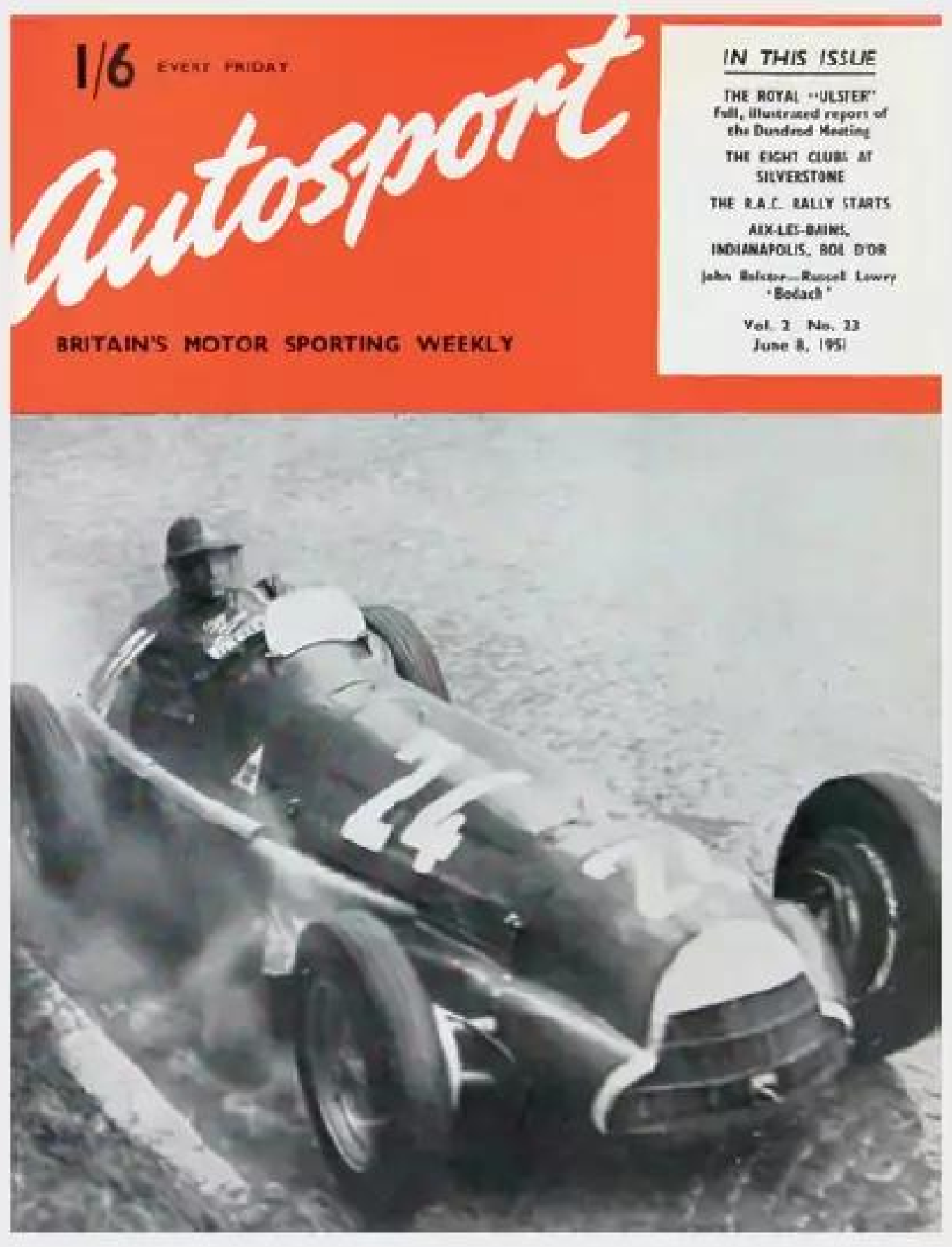
ALFA ROMEO 158/159

RACE RECORD

Starts	43
Wins	10
Pole positions	10
Fastest laps	13
Podiums	11
Championship points	163

SPECIFICATION

Chassis	Tubular steel
Suspension	Longitudinal links (f), swing axle/de Dion tube (r), transverse leaf springs, hydraulic dampers
Engine	Alfa Romeo inline-eight, supercharged
Engine capacity	1479cc
Power	350bhp @ 8500rpm – 420bhp @ 9500rpm
Gearbox	Four-speed manual
Brakes	Steel drums
Tyres	Pirelli
Weight	630-710kg
Notable drivers	Giuseppe Farina, Juan Manuel Fangio, Luigi Fagioli



1/6 EVERY FRIDAY

Autosport

BRITAIN'S MOTOR SPORTING WEEKLY

IN THIS ISSUE

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Full, illustrated report of the Dundrod Meeting

THE EIGHT CLUBS AT SILVERSTONE

THE R.A.C. RALLY STARTS

AIX-LES-BAINS, INDIANAPOLIS, BOL D'OR

John Bolster—Russell Lowry "Bodach"

Vol. 2 No. 23
June 8, 1951

FERRARI 375

RACE RECORD

Starts	27
Wins	3
Pole positions	3
Fastest laps	0
Podiums	10
Championship points	86

SPECIFICATION

Chassis	Tubular steel
Suspension	Double wishbones (f), de Dion tube (r), transverse leaf springs, hydraulic dampers
Engine	Ferrari 60-degree V12, naturally aspirated
Engine capacity	4493cc
Power	350bhp @ 7500rpm
Gearbox	Four-speed manual
Brakes	Steel drums
Tyres	Pirelli
Weight	850kg
Notable drivers	Alberto Ascari, Luigi Villoresi, Jose Froilan Gonzalez, Piero Taruffi

NOW
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A
RIVALRY

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BRITAIN'S MOTOR SPORTING WEEKLY

IN THIS ISSUE

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A Critical Investigation by Cameron C. Earl.

SILVERSTONE SURVEY

GOLDIE GARDNER'S RECORD BID

THE R.S.A.C.'s REST-AND-BE-THANKFUL HILLCLIMB

John Bolster—Russell Lowry—"Bodach"—R. A. O'Brien

Vol. 3. No. 2.
July 13, 1951

Maurice Hamilton's

ALTERNATIVE VIEW

The pre-season build-up stirs recollections of travel disruption, driver strikes, world-class brinkmanship and a ramshackle Formula 1 debut

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

Pre-season stress? Tell me about it. The first grand prix was always a worry, even before we got there. In 1987, our Wednesday evening flight from London to Brazil was delayed. Indefinitely. While Nigel Mansell sidestepped the problem by hiring a private jet to Madrid and picking up a commercial flight from there, the rest of us were carted off to a Heathrow hotel. We reached Rio de Janeiro 17 hours late and six hours before practice was due to start – assuming there would be any activity at all.

Those of us covering for national newspapers had messages waiting at our hotel receptions (this was before mobile phones). The hand-written notes in mangled English varied in both sense and legibility. But the gist seemed to be that the Formula 1 drivers were going on strike and could the various sports desks have between 500 and 750 words pronto, telling the world exactly what was going on? We hadn't the faintest clue.

Turns out, the drivers did not wish to pay for licences that had previously been free. The strike plan was ultimately undermined by an absence of unity among the 23 drivers, but news of their intentions brought a few sweaty moments for those of us who had been at Kyalami for the opening race in 1982.

The flights to South Africa that year had not been delayed – but they may as well have been since we spent the first day of what should have been practice sitting in solitary silence in the press room while the drivers locked themselves in the function room of a Johannesburg hotel. They had been asked to sign revised licences, Niki Lauda being astute enough to realise that this would tie each driver to their team in the manner of a footballer to their club. Lauda was also aware that the drivers needed to be free from the coercive influence of team managers. Which is why he had a bus waiting at the circuit entrance to whisk his colleagues away the moment they arrived.

I say we sat in solitary silence. That isn't quite true. OK, there wasn't much clacking of typewriters – mainly because there was little of substance to add to this basic story of absence without leave – but the increasing desperation for news of any kind suddenly erupted in a frenzy of anticipation.

The press room was on the second floor of the control tower. The unexpected sound of a DFV firing up in the pitlane below probably created the same sensation of foreplay as experienced by the FIA president hearing his latest batch of winner's medals has arrived from the toy shop. Was the strike over? Had one driver deserted the ranks? Whatever: this was *big*!

> ***"He did turn up at Phoenix at the eleventh hour. And then won the race. As only Senna could"***

L'EQUIPE
« Pas de licence, pas de Grand Prix »
est en rodage

Prost checks latest on 1987 Rio licence dispute

COLOMBO

Lauda laid on transport at Kyalami for striking drivers

SCHLEGELMILCH

Senna had locked horns with the FIA ahead of 1990 US GP

A stampede down the stairs led to the Lotus pit where Elio de Angelis, suited and booted, was in the cockpit of his rasping 87B. The sense of anticipation plummeted as rapidly as the V8's revs when the engine was switched off, 'Elio' climbing from the cockpit and removing his crash helmet to reveal a grinning Clive Hicks, the Lotus tyre man. So much for that story. Agreement was eventually reached, the weekend starting a day late – and several dollars short if you were a hapless paying spectator.

Ayrton Senna twice used pre-season brinkmanship to the maximum. On each occasion, the McLaren driver was in dispute with the FIA over something he had said. (Ayrton's invective-laden summary of the governing body's shortcomings was so bad that today's officials would have had a collective seizure.) In 1990, we travelled to Arizona for the first race not knowing whether the McLaren driver was going to grace us with his presence. He did turn up in Phoenix at the eleventh hour. And then won the race. As only Senna could.

In 1993, the first mission on arrival at Kyalami was to discover if the reigning champion team had been allowed into the paddock. Why? Due to a clerical error, Williams had been late submitting its official entry some weeks before. The unspoken reason behind the threat of such a ridiculous penalty was due to FIA president Max Mosley's umbrage over withering comments made by Williams's new driver, Alain Prost, while acting as a television commentator during his sabbatical in 1992. Williams was allowed in. And, yes, Prost won the race.

Today, we know that all 10 teams will be present and correct when practice starts in Melbourne. It wasn't always like this. Back in 1963, the ATS team failed to show for the first grand prix in Monaco. That was expected because the little Italian squad was rumoured to have been struggling to make its car complete a lap of private testing without falling apart. The continuing absence of ATS was noted at the next race in Belgium.

You can imagine the surprise, therefore, when practice at Spa was under way and trackside observers did a double take as a strange car suddenly spluttered by. It hadn't been seen before. Not in the paddock. Nor in the pitlane. Someone recognised the gaunt features of Phil Hill at the wheel. Since the 1961 world champion had switched from Ferrari to ATS, a process of simple elimination said this had to be the first appearance of an ATS. But how?

On-track appearance of ATS a surprise at Spa

The team had arrived after the start of practice and found themselves at Stavelot at the far end of the nine-mile track. Unable to go further and reach the paddock, the boys had simply unloaded their car, installed Hill in the cockpit, kicked aside a few straw bales and sent him on his way. Nobody said a word. To be fair, it was questionable in those days whether or not the official timekeepers had even noticed after a long lunch. Stress? Do me a favour.

WHO WILL BE THE 2025 F1 WORLD CHAMPION?

It's the question above all others on the eve of a new Formula 1 season. Our expert quartet state the case for their picks

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

MAX VERSTAPPEN

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Let's assume, for this thought experiment, that we're going to have four teams that are all pretty evenly matched at the sharp end of the grid: McLaren, Red Bull, Ferrari and Mercedes. If that is indeed the case, then let's also assume an equal split of wins: six each for all four teams. In that regard, it's going to come to this: which drivers from each team will win the lion's share of races, and how they perform on weekends where they don't have the fastest car.

These are conditions that reward two things: a driver's skill, and their superiority over a team-mate. At McLaren, Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri should be evenly matched, as the Australian continues his progress in F1. Ferrari has its box-office duo of Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton, while Mercedes' results might swing towards the more experienced George Russell early on, as Andrea Kimi Antonelli grows into the season.

Then there's Red Bull. Liam Lawson might be a fine driver, but you would expect him to trail Max Verstappen across the year; he's there to be the four-time champion's support act. That puts Verstappen on course to win all six of the allotted races assuming an equal split between the Big Four and, in that case, it comes down to driver skill for the remaining results.

For all of his late-season 'tactics' in battling Norris in 2024, Verstappen seemed to understand the importance of picking up the next-best results when victories aren't necessarily available. And, even on weekends when the Red Bull isn't quite up to it, he'll still be in the mix, which should allow him the chance to surpass his expected wins total as others falter. That's what championships are built on, and Verstappen is simply the best – and most uncompromising – operator out there.

LANDO NORRIS
BEN HUNT

When I spoke to Lando Norris in Abu Dhabi in December at the final race of last season, he told me he'd "learned what he needed to be a world champion; a different mentality". And I have absolutely no reason to doubt him.

Norris has been accused of being too soft in the past in his battles with Max Verstappen, but in the same interview he explained how he now realised that he needed to stand up to the reigning world champion's aggressive driving style if he is ever to beat him to the title.

Norris has the speed. He also appears to have the car beneath him if McLaren's pre-season testing pace is anything to go by. McLaren and Aston Martin are the only two teams to have kept the same driver pairing for 2025 and, while the impressive development of Oscar Piastri means he too comes into the mix for the championship, Norris's experience working with the team should give him the edge. I am firmly of the belief that Norris learned from his first proper title fight where, let's face it, he was always playing catch-up after Verstappen's great start to 2024.

Should McLaren be quick out of the box in Australia and Norris kick off the season with a solid start, then that will set the tone and motivation for the rest of the season. However, it is crucial that he recovers quickly from any setbacks and he cannot allow his head to drop.

Norris certainly knows what he needs to do and has the capability. He's got to go out there and do it consistently, and I believe he can.

CHARLES LECLERC
ALEX KALINAUCKAS

From a narrative point of view, Formula 1 is in desperate need of a winner in Ferrari red this year. But I don't think it will necessarily get the one that the championship officials and arch-marketeers really want. Because I believe Charles Leclerc can be the 2025 world champion.

He deservedly still has his reputation as F1's best and quickest qualifier – and there is no one more exciting to watch over a single lap. But the feeling that at any moment – often including in races – Leclerc would throw it all away in blazing Gilles Villeneuve-esque style? He did much to change that narrative with his excellent 2024 campaign.

Last season was the best of Leclerc's career by a big margin. He did lose out to Lando Norris and could, of course, operate without the pressure of the long-shot title chase faced by the McLaren driver, but that was really down to Ferrari's development misstep. His mistakes were fewer and he showed his mettle against Max Verstappen much better overall. Combine the speed, the reducing rate of errors and his beautiful racecraft, and you now surely have a true world title contender.

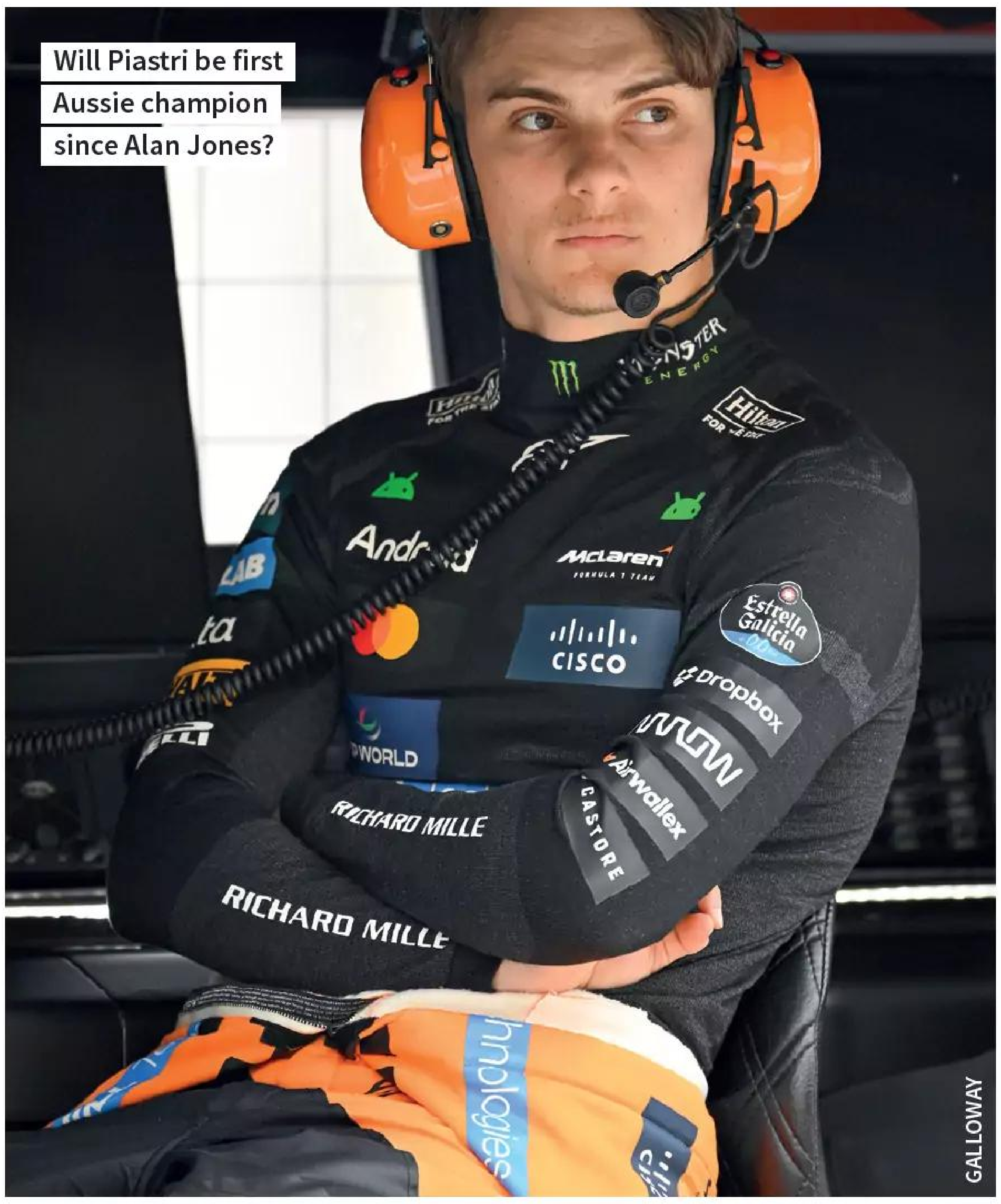
Lewis Hamilton's presence in the other Ferrari SF-25 naturally represents a big challenge to this prediction. But don't underestimate the drive Leclerc will have to succeed against the seven-time world champion in *his* team. He's smart enough to work with Hamilton, too. Together, they'll make for a truly absorbing story this season.

OSCAR PIASTRI
MARK MANN-BRYANS

Not since 2008 has someone wearing the colours of McLaren – whatever they may be – lifted the F1 drivers' championship. McLaren now has the best car, it won the constructors' title last year and looked very strong in pre-season testing. That is why we could have a first McLaren world drivers' champion in 17 years and there would certainly be similarities drawn with Lewis Hamilton: a young, talented, single-minded but level-headed individual who clearly has speed and can beat the rest of the field on his day. One major difference, though, is that the current McLaren incumbent I'm selecting to win the crown is Australian.

Similarly to Alex's choice of Charles Leclerc, from a narrative point of view having a McLaren world champion would tick a lot of boxes – albeit we are both tipping the driver who does not quite tell a British fairytale. Piastri was dogged in the way he raced against Lando Norris last year, never truly letting his team-mate get far enough clear that out-and-out team orders meant he had to cede track position to the man chasing down Max Verstappen. Instead, he shone in the edge of the spotlight, winning in Hungary and Azerbaijan – the latter in particular showing that he has the capability to stand clear of the field on any given Sunday.

If he can start the season with a dream victory in his home city of Melbourne, Piastri's confidence will be sky-high. He proved in 2024 that he is much more than just a second driver and, given a fair wind, the 23-year-old could leave a lasting mark on F1 to become the first Australian champion since Alan Jones in 1980.



Will Piastri be first Aussie champion since Alan Jones?

GALLOWAY

To watch a video of this debate go to youtube.com/@AutosportOfficial

DHL
10
PALOU
Firestone
INDYCAR HYBRID

The difference a day makes

Reigning IndyCar champion Alex Palou steers through the flat-out Turn 10 kink on the Tampa Bay-skirting Bayshore Drive during qualifying day for the 2025 season opener in the Florida city o f St Petersburg. It wasn't a resounding success – Palou placed his Honda-powered Chip Ganassi Racing Dallara an underwhelming eighth on the grid. But come race day the Spaniard's racecraft and savvy, together with CGR's strategy intuition, all came together. The mild-mannered Catalan beat team-mate Scott Dixon, whose St Pete hoodoo continued on a track that has provided none of his 58 wins, to start his bid for a fourth crown in fine style. Read more on p91.

Photographer Joe Skibinski/PEC

Where St Petersburg, Florida, USA
When 1 March 2025

Details Canon EOS R3
RF-50mm lens, 1/5000th @ F1.2

FERRARO/GETTY IMAGES

FORMULA E

Rowland puts Nissan on top

A win and a second place in Jeddah have put the Brit into a useful lead in the electric world championship

STEFAN MACKLEY

Oliver Rowland stamped his authority on the Formula E season by taking a healthy 17-point lead in the standings after the latest round in Saudi Arabia, which almost yielded a double success for the Briton.

Nissan driver Rowland came away from the Jeddah Corniche Circuit last month with his second win of the campaign, the electric championship making its first visit to the Formula 1 venue and using a truncated layout including four temporary chicanes.

While Rowland dominated the weekend's second race, and led 18 of the 31 laps, he had given best to fellow Briton Taylor Barnard in qualifying, the 20-year-old becoming the youngest polesitter in Formula E history. The McLaren driver's brace of podiums from the event along with his third place at the Sao Paulo season-opener mean he now sits second in the standings.

Rowland almost came away a double Jeddah E-Prix victor – he only lost the lead in the opening race to poleman Maximilian Guenther into the final chicane on the last lap.

"He did everything right, made himself very wide but I knew if he had to lift early then I've got a chance and I took it," said Guenther, after his inaugural win for DS Penske and his first since Tokyo last season.

That race was notable for the first use of the Pit Boost recharging concept, requiring all drivers to make a mandatory pitstop to receive a 10% battery top-up via a detachable charger. The strategic shake-up, coupled with the all-wheel-drive Attack Mode, meant Guenther rejoined eighth after running second, before eventually going on his race-winning charge. The Pit Boost technology is set to be used in one race at all remaining double-headers.

Rowland's double podium also means he has helped move Nissan to the top of the teams' standings, where the Japanese manufacturer sits one point ahead of customer team McLaren.

The Jeddah event was a disaster for Porsche, which came away with a total of just six points and remains winless after four races this season despite being the general pacesetter.

Antonio Felix da Costa had entered the event as championship leader courtesy of two runner-up finishes in Brazil and Mexico but was the victim of two consecutive opening-lap assaults, the first from Nico Muller and the second from Guenther. The Portuguese was able to salvage ninth in that first race despite the heavy rear-end damage but was forced to retire from the sequel, with both Muller and Guenther handed penalties for the incidents.

"What hurts is if we score close to no points because we're slow that's on us, but I got hit massively hard both days on lap one by very experienced people," said da Costa. "They both came to apologise but it's hard to swallow, it's just not acceptable at this level. We're professionals getting paid to do this job and people are behaving like they're rookies."

Da Costa's Porsche team-mate, reigning champion Pascal Wehrlein, fared little better. He was also hit from behind on the opening lap of race one, in his case by Mitch Evans, which required a pitstop and left him out of the points. A software glitch consigned him to 13th on the grid in the second race, before he was able to recover to eighth.

Evans, who was penalised for his collision with Wehrlein, was also forced to pit for damage and non-scored again in race two, in which he suffered a technical problem. Jaguar team-mate Nick Cassidy made it three non-points finishes on the bounce in the opening race, complaining about a lack of speed on the straights, but was able to get off the mark in the next race with fifth.

Evans and Cassidy sit 43 and 58 points respectively behind Rowland in the title chase, and reigning teams' champion Jaguar is seeking a major upgrade package during the two-month gap before the next round in Miami on 12 April.

Lindblad with Chris Amon Trophy

BRUCE JENKINS

LINDBLAD TITLE AS SLATER MISSES OUT

Two of Britain's top young talents completed their winter race programmes in February. While Red Bull Junior Arvid Lindblad got across the line to secure enough points for an F1 superlicence with victory in New Zealand's Formula Regional Oceania series, fellow Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award finalist Freddie Slater missed out on FR Middle East glory at the finale.

Lindblad's second place behind Patrick Heuzenroeder in race one of the final weekend at the superb Highlands Motorsport Park circuit was enough to seal the deal. Just as well, because he was ushered into the barrier at the start of the reversed-grid race, forcing his M2 Competition team to prepare the series' spare car for the finale: the historic New Zealand Grand Prix.

With 10 laps to go, Lindblad had worked his way up to third, and smashed a 4.4s deficit to second-placed Zack Scoular to finish 0.9s adrift. Just in front of the British F4 graduate was Australian Supercars champion Will Brown, a sensation on his single-seater return, during which he wore a helmet belonging to his pal Liam Lawson because his tin-top lid didn't pass FIA muster!

Thanks to two double-winning weekends at Yas Marina, Slater entered the FRME finale at Lusail with a chance of the title with the Prema-run Mumbai Falcons team, but he came off worst in a clash with ART Grand Prix's series leader Evan Giltaire in the first race. The Frenchman secured the crown with fourth place in race two.

Mini topped test, while Browning (bottom) is another hot F3 graduate

J SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

P93 OPINION

FORMULA 2

F1 stars of tomorrow?

While the eyes of the world will be on Melbourne over 14-16 March for the Formula 1 opener, talent spotters will also be paying close attention, with the F2 and F3 seasons kicking off on the support card. Here's how the F2 grid lines up, in last year's teams' championship order.

Invicta Racing
Leonardo Fornaroli hopes to 'do a Bortoleto' in joining the Norfolk team as reigning F3 champion. He'd do well to start actually winning some races though. Roman Stanek, in the sister car, is already a race winner in F2.

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

Campos Racing
The Spanish squad again runs a brace of Red Bull juniors. Pepe Marti stays on after a good-in-parts rookie year, and the exciting Arvid Lindblad steps into Isack Hadjar's shoes for his graduation from F3.

MP Motorsport
Another Red Bull driver here, with Oliver Goethe set for his first full F2 season. Alongside is the veteran Richard Verschoor, who usually has a win or two within him and is back with his Dutch pals.

Hitech GP
Two of the F3 class of 2024 fly the flag for the Silverstone operation. Williams junior Luke Browning is a talent to watch, and so is Ferrari's Swedish protege Dino Beganovic.

Prema Racing
Italian giant normally keeps its powder dry in testing, but F3 graduate Gabriele Mini topped the three-day Barcelona running. The Sicilian is Prema's main hope, with Sebastian Montoya in the other car.

DAMS
A very solid line-up *chez* this French team. Texan Jak Crawford is the highest-placed driver from 2024 (fifth) staying on in F2, and Indian Kush Maini is also a winner.

ART Grand Prix
Can the other *equipe de France* bounce back? Victor Martins is now off the Alpine junior roster but looked sensational in 2023. Toyota hope Ritomo Miyata shifts from Rodin to pilot the other car.

Rodin Motorsport
McLaren's Irish hope Alex Dunne had a frustrating year in F3 but moves up to join Farnham's finest. Next to him is Australian Christian Mansell, who unlike his namesake isn't driving a Ralt-Honda in F2.

AIX Racing
Joshua Duerksen had a superb rookie season with the Berlin squad and the Paraguayan hero stays on for more. He's joined in the line-up by Brit Cian Shields.

Trident
Two more F3 graduates here, where promising Marseillaise Sami Meguetounif graduates with the Italian team to join bespectacled New Yorker Max Esterson.

Van Amersfoort Racing
Last year's GB3 runner-up John Bennett takes the plunge into F2 full-time with the patriotically orange Dutch team, while Mexican Rafael Villagomez stays on for another year in the sister car.

THE RACER

Pit talk from the HRDC

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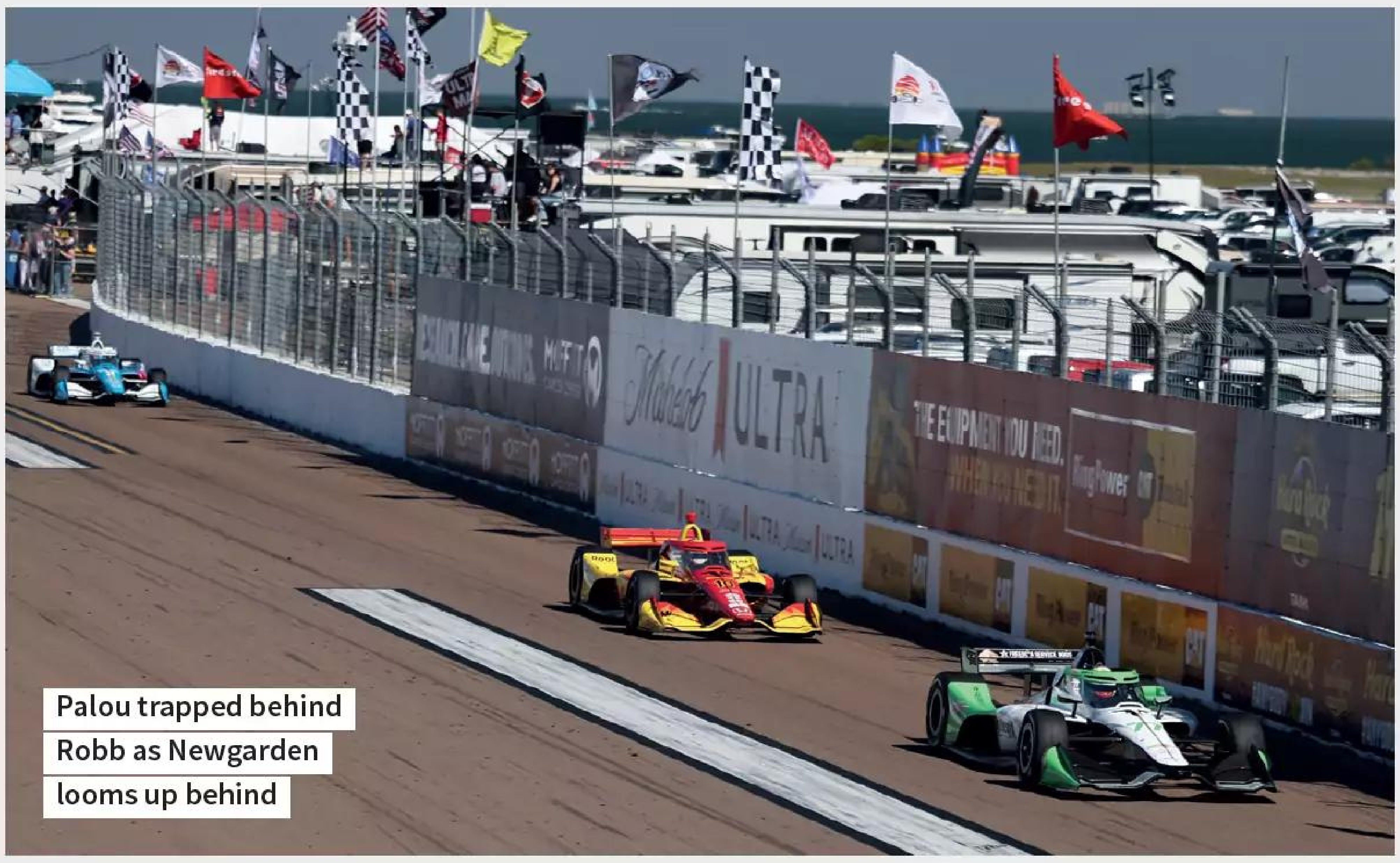


Palou trapped behind Robb as Newgarden looms up behind

SKIBINSKI/PEC

INDYCAR

PALOU STEPS UP AT ST PETE

Chip Ganassi Racing has a multi-champion superstar capable of extracting wins from what seem the most impossible of circumstances. Scratch that: it has two of them, because Alex Palou is a Catalan clone of Scott Dixon.

Reigning title holder Palou bobbed around in the mix for over half of the IndyCar season opener on the streets of St Petersburg, then suddenly emerged in the catbird seat with 28 of the 100 laps remaining when he surfaced from his final pitstop. The problem for Dixon was that he should have pitted at the same time, but didn't…

In a race of three different strategies, Dixon looked to be in the prime position as his Honda-powered Ganassi car led Josef Newgarden's Chevrolet-propelled Penske machine and Palou. The first to bail for their final pitstops was Newgarden. Two laps later in came Palou; next time round it was Dixon. The veteran Kiwi was not only undercut by Palou, but also found Newgarden quickly sliding down his inside into Turn 1. How had this come to be?

Dixon, it transpired, had a malfunctioning radio. The Ganassi team wanted him and Palou in together, but he didn't know, and had to rely on his fuel warning light. "We lost about two or three seconds on that in-lap, so that was a bit of a nightmare," he said. "Yeah, needed like a lap board out there or something."

Palou's stunning early-stint pace on the prime compound Firestone tyres allowed him to stretch a five-second lead, but this was all eradicated when he caught tail-ender Sting Ray Robb and couldn't get close enough to lap him. Luckily for Palou, Newgarden and Dixon couldn't get close enough either. They cleared Robb with five laps to go, and that seemed to be it. Until an electronics glitch meant a gear mis-shift for Newgarden, and Dixon was able to dive down the inside of Turn 11 on the final lap to snatch second.

The leading trio all started on the fragile green-compound Firestone alternates, and a first-lap caution – Will Power, Nolan Siegel and debutant Louis Foster were all eliminated – allowed them to get off them and fit the primes for their remaining three stints. On the same strategy, Colton Herta left them for dead and the Andretti Global racer should likely have won, only for refuelling and wheel dramas.

Penske's poleman Scott McLaughlin started on the prime tyres and looked serene out front, but his short second stint on the alternate rubber put paid to his hopes unless there was another caution – which never came – though he still rescued fourth.

McLaren newcomer Christian Lundgaard also led after going longer on the prime tyres before finally fitting the greens for his third stint. Could he make them last? That was the plan, but no, and he finished eighth.

Kiwis McLaughlin and Dixon both out of luck

JONES/PEC

RACE WINNERS 8 February - 2 March

FORMULA E

Jeddah 14-15 February

Race 1
1 **Maximilian Guenther** (DS Penske)
2 **Oliver Rowland** (Nissan)
3 **Taylor Barnard** (McLaren Nissan)

Race 2
1 **Rowland**
2 **Barnard**
3 **Jake Hughes** (Maserati MSG)

POINTS 1 **Rowland** 68; 2 Barnard 51; 3 Antonio Felix da Costa 39.

INDYCAR

St Petersburg 2 March
1 **Alex Palou** (Chip Ganassi Racing)
2 **Scott Dixon** (Chip Ganassi Racing)
3 **Josef Newgarden** (Team Penske)

POINTS 1 **Palou** 51; 2 Dixon 41; 3 Newgarden 36.

INDY NXT

St Petersburg 2 March
Dennis Hauger (Andretti Global)

POINTS 1 **Hauger** 54; 2 Lochie Hughes 41; 3 Caio Collet 35.

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST

Dubai 8-9 February

Race 1	**Ugo Ugochukwu** (R-ace GP)
Race 2	**Jin Nakamura** (R-ace GP)
Race 3	**Evan Giltaire** (ART Grand Prix)

Yas Marina 15-16 February

Races 1 & 3	**Freddie Slater** (Mumbai Falcons)
Race 2	**Akshay Bohra** (R-ace GP)

Lusail 27-28 February

Race 1	**Nikita Bedrin** (Sainteloc Racing)
Race 2	**Enzo Deligny** (R-ace GP)
Race 3	**Jack Beeton** (Mumbai Falcons)

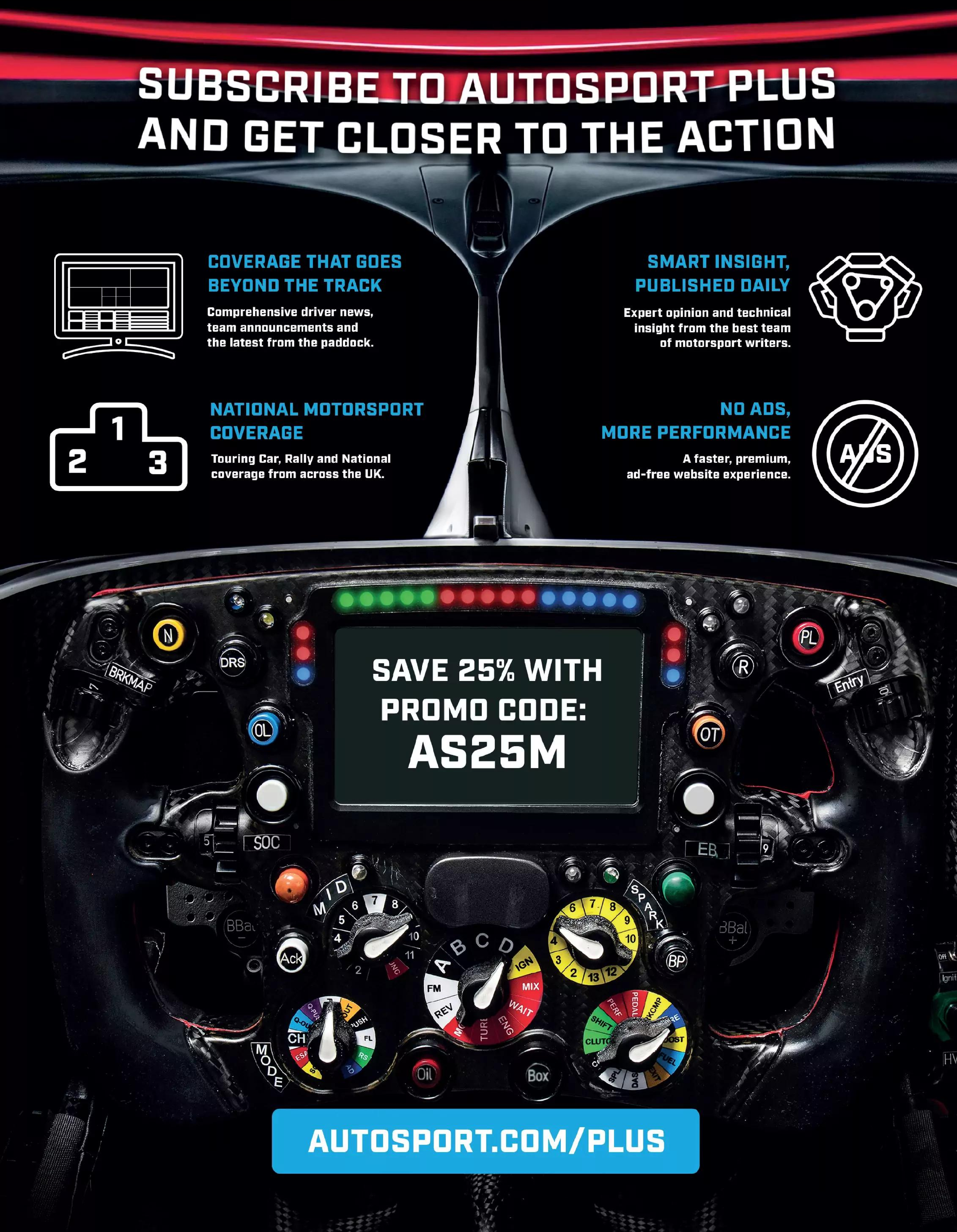
POINTS 1 **Giltaire** 264; 2 Slater 228; 3 Ugochukwu 205.

FORMULA REGIONAL OCEANIA

Highlands 8-9 February

Race 1	**Patrick Heuzenroeder** (MTEC Motorsport)
Race 2	**Nikita Johnson** (M2 Competition)
Race 3	**Will Brown** (Giles Motorsport)

POINTS 1 **Arvid Lindblad** 370; 2 Zack Scoular 314; 3 Johnson 305.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STALEY/GETTY IMAGES

McLaren junior Dunne knew time was right to step up to F2

INSIDER

Stephen Lickorish spotlights rising talent on the single-seater ladder

Finishing 14th in the FIA Formula 3 standings may not sound like the result of a driver who should be regarded as a potential F2 frontrunner, but Alex Dunne is clearly more talented than his F3 performances demonstrated. After dominating the 2022 British F4 Championship (he also finished a strong second to Andrea Kimi Antonelli in Italian F4 that year), before taking the GB3 runner-up spot the following season, the Irishman admits that his F3 campaign with MP Motorsport did not exactly go to plan. "Sometimes we got unlucky and things just didn't click," says the McLaren junior, who ended the year more impressively with front-row qualifying efforts at Spa and Monza.

Given his struggles, he decided early on that he wanted a new challenge for 2025. "I felt I needed to step up to F2 if the opportunity was there and we found the funding," he says.

It may sound counterintuitive for a driver who failed to crack F3 to then move to the top rung of the junior single-seater ladder, but there are very good reasons for making the leap now. "A lot of drivers are moving up to F2, so it's got quite a lot of rookies, so it makes sense to move with them," he explains. "It's not like the grid is full of experienced second-year drivers. Also, this year there's a new car in F3 so it's a bit of a lottery to get it right. We saw with the new car in F2 last year that it shuffles things around."

Remaining in F3 was therefore a less compelling proposition, and instead Dunne signed with Rodin Motorsport for an F2 campaign. "Once I knew I was doing F2, it was nice to relax and reset and fully focus on the F2 year, and forget about what happened last year," he adds.

And that reset seemed to do Dunne the power of good. He was instantly on the pace during post-season F2 testing in Abu Dhabi last December, ending the three days with the third-fastest time as quickest of the newcomers: "I felt pretty good straight away – the team massively helped me get to grips with the car and I hit the ground running."

He remained a frontrunner in the recent Barcelona pre-season test, although the true picture was muddied by Dunne being one of four drivers to have their day-two times deleted for unspecified technical infringements. He had set the seventh-best lap of the test on that morning. Nevertheless, Dunne is still confident of a strong season ahead and is optimistic of springing a surprise. "The aim is always to win, but it's my rookie year and it's going to be difficult – there's a lot of very talented drivers on the grid," he points out.

One of those rivals with a greater degree of expectation on his shoulders is Arvid Lindblad. The Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award finalist heads to Melbourne after an incredibly busy winter during which he claimed the Formula Regional Oceania title (effectively the old Toyota Racing Series) as well as completing F1 testing with Racing Bulls. He continued the momentum from his Antipodean adventure into F2 testing with Campos Racing and was one of the fastest.

Lindblad certainly left an impression on his FROC team boss Jonathan Moury, whose M2 Competition squad has won titles in New Zealand with Lando Norris, Liam Lawson and Lance Stroll. "There was a lot of pressure on him from everyone – whether it's himself, Red Bull and the public," says Moury. "What stands out is how mature he is for someone who is 17 and how much he can use that talent."

It was only a relatively late deal for Lindblad to join the grid, and Moury says this brought him "outside of his comfort zone". When Norris made a similar trip nine years ago, he was surrounded by his management team. For Lindblad, his usual entourage was not present, just his parents. "We had Lando in the team at a similar age and they both had bucketloads of talent," adds Moury. "But Lando wasn't at the same stage of his career, so you can't compare like for like, but Lando was a bit more shy while Arvid is not shy! He has this confidence and maturity. His feedback is amazing, and his knowledge of what to look for and his approach is already on a par with professional drivers."

Lindblad's primary objective was to earn the superlicence points he needs to jump into F1 should the chance arise, but he will also be eager to continue that title-winning form, after finishing fourth in F3 last year. However, there are plenty of other drivers to watch out for (see p89) and no shortage of intriguing plotlines. How these two F1 juniors stack up against some quality opposition will be just one to follow.

PIT LANE 2024
F1 ACADEMY

PAULINE BALLET/FORMULA 1/GETTY IMAGES

HEAD OF THE WOLFF PACK

F1 Academy chief Susie Wolff must fight tooth and claw to champion women in motorsport, despite support in high places. It's a battle she is ready and willing to take on as the all-female series heads into its third season

REBECCA CLANCY

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

Susie Wolff is sitting in a corner office in Formula 1 headquarters in central London, jumping between rooms as she doesn't actually have a permanent desk here. As managing director of F1 Academy, the all-female racing series now entering its third season, she is in the capital to see the bosses. Wolff is notably relaxed and in good spirits as she discusses the series.

The night before our interview she had shown a few of the upper F1 management the first episode of the F1 Academy documentary, due for release later this year and shot by Reese Witherspoon's production company, Hello Sunshine – a similar proposition to F1's hugely successful *Drive to Survive*, with both showing on Netflix.

What fans will see when they watch is that the first two seasons have been a success, with the first in 2023 partly conducted behind closed doors but last season's championship run as an undercard series on F1 weekends. All 10 F1 teams now have involvement with the series and are taking it seriously. Lewis Hamilton was regularly spotted in the F1A paddock lending his support last year and there was always a never-ending stream of fans passing through the area, which is far more accessible than F1's own paddock.

F1 Academy's own mission statement, as it were, points specifically to breaking down barriers for young girls and women in motorsport, but Wolff is never more than a question away from being asked when will the next female break into F1. »

It is now nearly 50 years since a woman last competed in a world championship F1 race – Lella Lombardi back in 1976. Wolff herself took part in practice sessions for Williams during four F1 race weekends in 2014-15 but never landed a chance to start a race.

Wolff has previously been quoted as saying she thinks it will be eight to 10 years before we see a female in F1, a point she wishes she hadn't made. "I kind of regret saying that because it makes the current drivers think that I don't believe they can do it," Wolff says. "And I don't believe that. I see a lot of talent out there, and I see possibilities of young drivers that can make it. So, I definitely regret saying that, but we need to be realistic. There are only 20 spots on the grid in F1 and getting to the pinnacle of any sport is tough. But I still think it's definitely possible.

"I think with the F1 teams now getting very focused on helping young drivers earlier, that's going to play a big part in helping that timeline reduce."

There is no doubt that all eyes within motorsport are focused on finding the next female F1 driver, and there is certainly plenty of talent out there moving in the right direction.

Last season's F1 Academy champion, Abbi Pulling, received a fully funded drive to race in the GB3 Championship this year with Rodin Motorsport as part of her prize. The 21-year-old has spoken openly of how the series gave her a lifeline, with funding having previously dried up just a few years ago.

Racing for Rodin, the then Alpine Academy member dominated F1A, with nine wins from a possible 14, 10 pole positions and never once finishing off the podium, which all meant she claimed the crown by a whopping 121 points. And Pulling's relationship with the Academy does not end with her championship. The series has a talent development manager, Katie Denver, who will travel to some of the GB3 races with Pulling to support her.

It's not just the champion who is moving onwards and upwards. Bianca Bustamante, who finished seventh in the Academy last season, will also compete in GB3 this year. Marta Garcia, who won the inaugural championship in 2023, now competes in GT racing with Iron Dames.

The talent development manager role is an interesting one. The Academy is building a database of all young female drivers who are competing globally in karting or single-seaters to help them find the talent coming up through the ranks.

The purpose, as Wolff puts it, is to ensure they "always have the best 18 on our grid". It is this search that seems to be Wolff's biggest concern and where she has focused a lot of her attention. It is a subject that crops up throughout the interview.

"I think [through] the exposure of F1 Academy, we have established ourselves as a destination for young female drivers," Wolff says. "Bearing in mind a young female driver can't get herself to a race track and can't pay for a test or a karting season, it's the parents who now see that there is a clear pathway of opportunity. And with the F1 teams and the brands that we have in the series, it's something which is a huge thing of pride if you now make it to F1 Academy.

"You could be matched up with an incredible brand or with an F1 team. And if you're good enough, the F1 team then might continue with you further up your career. And you see now some of the teams have also signed young girls who are already in karting and getting them ready for F1 Academy.

"So that's had a huge impact. But we've also been very proactive in the world of karting. It's my world."

It certainly is Wolff's world. An accomplished racing driver herself, she was the ideal pick for F1 to put in charge of the all-female racing series. During her two years in charge, she has worked to get all 10 F1 teams involved, and this will be the championship's second season as a support series at F1 weekends – seven this year, including Las Vegas as the finale for the first time.

"For me, it was so clear I had to get the F1 teams on board, because of their knowledge and their power in junior categories of building drivers up," she says. "I mean, that's their business, that's what they do.

"Last year, once I had the F1 teams on board, once I got with the F1 race weekends, my biggest worry was, where is the talent? And how are we nurturing the talent from a young enough age so that, by the time they get to F1 Academy, they're ready for the opportunity and they're going to grab it with both hands, and then the best will go onwards and upwards?"

The rules of the Academy mean that drivers can only compete for a maximum of two seasons, which gives Wolff the headache of having to ensure that there is always female talent coming through. Not an easy feat when only 10% of drivers globally are female.

"The rule of moving on after two years, I knew it was right because it gave up-and-coming drivers a chance," Wolff says. "In the end, if you've had two seasons of F1 Academy, you have to move on. It put me in a very challenging position of ensuring there's enough young girls coming up. But I wanted to challenge myself: if we're going to do this, we've got to do it right. »

McKLEIN

Lombardi made her last F1 start at '76 Austrian GP

FERRARO

Pulling received her trophy at Autosport Awards

S BLOXHAM

Lewis Hamilton has been a big support to Wolff

> *“It was so clear I had to get the F1 teams on board, because of their knowledge and power”*

F1 Academy became an F1 support act last season

NG

"I don't believe in quotas. I don't believe in a woman making it just because she is a woman"

Above: F2 cars lack power steering, unlike senior siblings

Below: Wolff made it to F1, but only in a Williams test role

"It cannot be that a winner just stays, or a top-six finisher just keeps racing in F1 Academy year after year. You need to move on. We're not here to become a landing destination. We are the facilitator of maximising potential and making sure the talent goes onwards and upwards."

Wolff spent 10 years of her racing career in karting and still has strong relationships that have opened doors for the Academy. As part of its plans to ensure a flowing pipeline of female talent, the series has partnered with Champions of the Future Academy Program, which starts to identify talent from as young as eight years old within karting across three mixed-gender categories: Minis (ages 8-11), Juniors (ages 11-14) and Seniors (ages 14+). For this season, the Seniors grid is 50% female.

"We worked with them primarily because they capped budgets and it works as an engine lottery, chassis lottery," explains Wolff. "It takes away the whole question mark around which team you get into, how many engines you have, the whole spending war."

The uptick in female participation in karting has already been nicknamed the 'F1 Academy effect'. But what does success look like for the Academy? Is F1 the ultimate destination, or is success giving these women a professional racing career?

"Success is both," Wolff replies without hesitation. "We all know how tough Formula 1 is. It has very limited opportunity."

"It's tough, male or female, to make it to the top. And I don't believe in quotas. I don't believe in a woman making it just because she's a woman. If a woman's going to make it to Formula 1, it's because she's good enough, because no team will take that risk. And I don't think they should include someone in the car that's not ready. So it's up to us to unearth the talent and give them the opportunity, because I'm a big believer in getting chances in life.

"If we just give them the chance, the best will grab it and they will go with it. Whether that means they go on to be a GT driver, a World Endurance driver, a Formula E driver, that's still a success for me. Any woman who's in motorsport and turns around and says, 'Well, I'm here because of F1 Academy', that is a success story for me, because we're changing the perception of the sport."

But a female rising through the ranks to F1 is not just about opportunity. There is a physical element to it that cannot be ignored. A key issue that has been pointed to countless times is power steering. F1 has it. F2 and F3 do not. Wolff is in favour of introducing power steering in the junior categories but Bruno Michel, the F2 and F3 CEO, is against it.

"We will always agree to disagree," reflects Wolff. "He doesn't think F2 and F3 should have power steering. I absolutely believe they should have, but that's not my decision to take, and we had many discussions over it. He feels that he's moved the cars into a direction where it is more physically... I don't want to use the word easier, but it is less challenging. But having driven an F1 car, I still think it's not enough. I don't understand why the junior formulas don't replicate what it is they're all aiming for, and that's Formula 1, and Formula 1 has power steering."

Could this be the barrier that stops women making it into F1? "I don't think it's a barrier that will stop them, but it is a big challenge," answers Wolff. "Because if it's tough for a male driver physically, we have 30% less muscle. And I wouldn't be as frustrated by the situation if F1 didn't have power steering, because then you need those muscles built up, and then it needs to be tough, because it's tough the whole way.

"It's just that for all the people that sit at a table and tell me, 'Well, we're doing this, we're doing this' – A, they're not women, and B, they haven't driven a Formula 1 car. But I respect that there's a difference of opinions out there. I certainly just feel, having driven the car, it's not the steering in F1 that's a challenge."

Wolff admits she has "gone to battle" on this topic, one she feels very strongly about.

"I think it is a battle, and I see it as my role running F1 Academy," she says. "It's not just about this series. It's about the success of the young drivers that we're supporting. Because it doesn't count for anything if our drivers don't go on to actually compete successfully in motorsport. And to compete successfully, you need to compete against men.

"That is this sport. So, if I would just be in my tunnel vision of making F1 Academy a success, I don't think we're building ourselves up for long-term success. We need to go down and get the next generation coming up, and we need to make sure that the most talented are moving up.

"So, I do go to battle on these things, because they're really important for long-term success. I will always stand up when I believe very strongly in something. But in the end, there's only so much I can do. And the rest comes down to the decision-makers in the sport deciding what's right."

Wolff certainly does stand up for what she believes in and has never shied away from taking the fight to the highest level. She has already pushed the boundaries within her own racing career and is now helping other young women forge theirs.

MASON

Champion Pulling had Alpine F1 support behind her

ASTON MARTIN
007
THE HEART OF RACING
PORSCHE
PENSKE
6
50
60

A better type of street traffic

Instead of a pre-event group photograph at the track, the World Endurance Championship pack took one car from each team to downtown Lusail for something a bit different following last month's Prologue. The lights of the Lusail Boulevard mixed with the latest hypercars provided a stunning background and got the series opener under way in style. Porsche's 963 leads the way here but it was the trio of Ferrari 499Ps that very much came to the fore in the 10-hour contest. Turn to page 102 to read how the famous Italian marque did it before the series moves on to Imola in April.

Photographer JEP

Where Lusail Boulevard, Qatar
When Monday 24 February 2025

Details Canon EOS R3
RF28-70mm lens, 1/60th @ F8
Mode: Manual
Metering: Multi-segment
ISO: 4000

WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP
ROUND 1
RACE DEBRIEF

Fuoco/Nielsen/Molina 499P leads home dominant Ferrari 1-2-3

JEP

WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

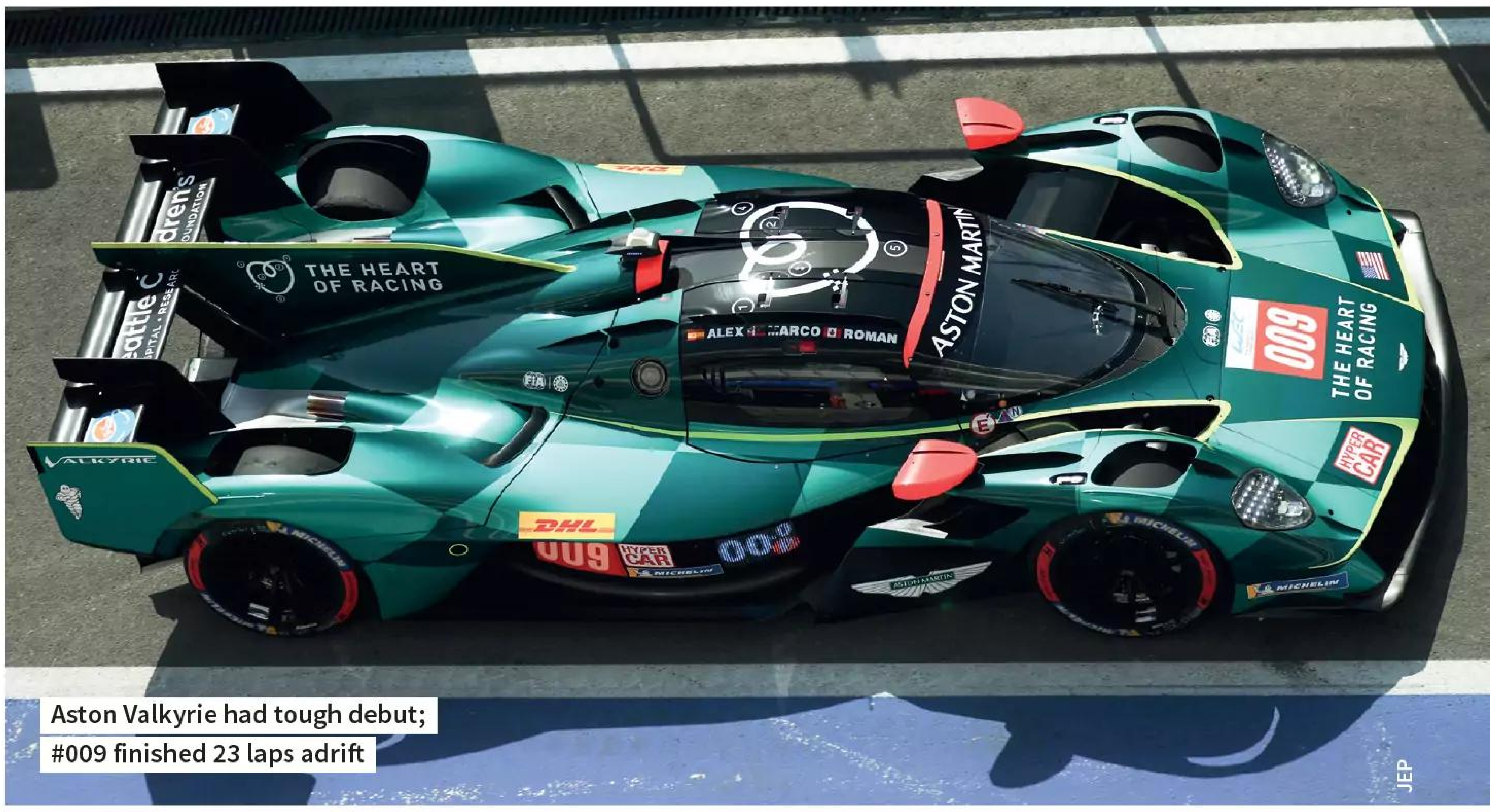
DOMINANT FERRARIS ENJOY A DESERT STORMER

Each of the Ferrari 499Ps that flashed past the chequered flag almost line astern in positions one to three at the Qatar World Endurance Championship curtain-raiser would have been a worthy winner. They were separated by less than three seconds after 10 hours of racing, and any one of them might have come out on top in the dash to the finish after the final pitstops. There was one thing that was never in doubt in the desert at the end of February, and that was a Ferrari victory.

The Italian manufacturer's Le Mans Hypercar was dominant around the Lusail International Circuit. So dominant that one of the 499Ps was able to fight back from no new fewer than four penalties to take the final podium spot. No one else was genuinely in the game in Qatar, though the two manufacturers closest to Ferrari on pace didn't do themselves any favours.

The internecine battle at Ferrari went the way of Antonio Fuoco, Nicklas Nielsen and Miguel Molina at the end of a race that reached the 10-hour cut-off 17 laps short of the scheduled 335. They claimed a first WEC victory outside of Le Mans for one of the factory AF Corse-run Hypercar entries by just 2.3 seconds from the customer AF car shared by Robert Kubica, Yifei Ye and Phil Hanson. Just 0.3s further back in third was the second works 499P of James Calado, Antonio Giovinazzi and Alessandro Pier Guidi. As dominant as they were, at least the three Ferraris made a race of it over the final three quarters of an hour, the gaps between them ever narrowing. When Fuoco leapfrogged Kubica in the pits with 44 minutes to go because he stopped four laps later and required less fuel to go to the finish, he emerged with a lead of just under six seconds. Pier Guidi, meanwhile, trailed the second of the Ferraris, the yellow one, by 13s.

The trio of Ferraris were on different tyre strategies, or at least Michelins of different age and state of wear. Each was running the hard compound on the left and the medium on the right, pretty much the default combination in Qatar once the temperatures had peaked a couple of hours or so after the 1400 start time. Fuoco had left-side hards that were now into their third stint, while Kubica had four tyres under him that were going into a triple. Pier Guidi, who had taken over from Calado at the final stop, was given a couple



Aston Valkyrie had tough debut; #009 finished 23 laps adrift

JEP

Best-of-the-rest #15 BMW forced to play catch-up after early setback

of new hards on the left.

Pier Guidi was the man on the move, as he should have been with the fresher rubber under him, but arguably Kubica was the star. He edged towards the leader, who was being told from his pit to look after the hard-used left-front in the final laps. The customer Ferrari, really a kind of satellite works entry that doesn't score manufacturers' points, got the gap down to under three seconds with 10 or so minutes to go.

Kubica's problem, however, was that he now had Pier Guidi on his tail: his attention had to switch from looking forwards to behind. Had the customer car not had its mirrors full of the works car behind it, could it have done something about the one in front? That will never be known. The same applies to what Calado and co could have done without their string of penalties for various on-track and pitlane misdemeanours.

Calado had no doubt that his car, which Giovinazzi had put on pole, was the fastest of the Ferraris in Qatar. That wasn't borne out by the averages, however. It was nip and tuck between the two works cars: on a 75-lap average it was the winning car that came out on top by a shade over 0.08s. The customer car was another 0.1s further back. The time lost to the four penalties – two drive-throughs and two stop-and-holds – was mostly mitigated by the four safety cars that interrupted this race. But it wasn't ideal in terms of track position: after the final safety car, Pier Guidi was down in seventh while the other two Italian cars sat at the top of the leaderboard.

That Pier Guidi might have snatched it at the end proves that the 499P was in a league of its own in Qatar. The car had the edge on one-lap pace, was at least as good as anyone else in looking after its tyres – not a big factor on the ultra-smooth Lusail surface – and was quick on the all-important out-laps in these days of no tyre heaters.

BMW had the second quickest car in Qatar. The fastest of its two M Hybrid V8 LMDhs shared by Dries Vanthoor, Kevin Magnussen and Raffaele Marciello claimed the best-of-the-rest spot with fourth at the death ahead of the two Toyotas after spending much of the race making up for a setback in the opening hour. Magnussen haemorrhaged time when the speed limiter stuck on following a first quickfire Full Course Yellow virtual safety car – and needed a new nose after contact as the BMW was bundled down the field. Vanthoor was penalised later for contact with Fuoco, but fourth was as good as it was going to get.

The Jota Cadillac squad would have been in the mix for that position with one or both of its cars, but for an early-race implosion. The two V-Series.R LMDhs were running 1-2 in the crocodile at the first safety car when Alex Lynn ran into the back of Jenson Button between the penultimate and final corners as the course vehicle prepared to pull in. The team and drivers, unsurprisingly, chose not to discuss the incident, for which Lynn was penalised.

"Ferrari were just quicker, just better on pace," was how BMW M Motorsport boss Andreas Roos summed it up. "There wasn't a lot we could do."

GARY WATKINS

RESULTS

LM HYPERCAR/OVERALL

1 **Antonio Fuoco/Miguel Molina/Nicklas Nielsen**
Ferrari AF Corse
Ferrari 499P
318 laps in 10h01m39.098s
Grid 3rd (1m38.692s)

2 **Robert Kubica/Yifei Ye/Phil Hanson**
AF Corse
Ferrari 499P
+2.348s
Grid 8th (1m39.299s)

3 **Alessandro Pier Guidi/James Calado/Antonio Giovinazzi**
Ferrari AF Corse
Ferrari 499P
+2.677s
Grid 1st (1m38.359s)

4 **Dries Vanthoor/Raffaele Marciello/Kevin Magnussen**
BMW M Team WRT
BMW M Hybrid V8
+9.907s
Grid 2nd (1m38.495s)

5 **Sebastien Buemi/Brendon Hartley/Ryo Hirakawa**
Toyota Gazoo Racing
Toyota GR010 HYBRID
+19.628s
Grid 17th (1m46.289s)

LMGT3

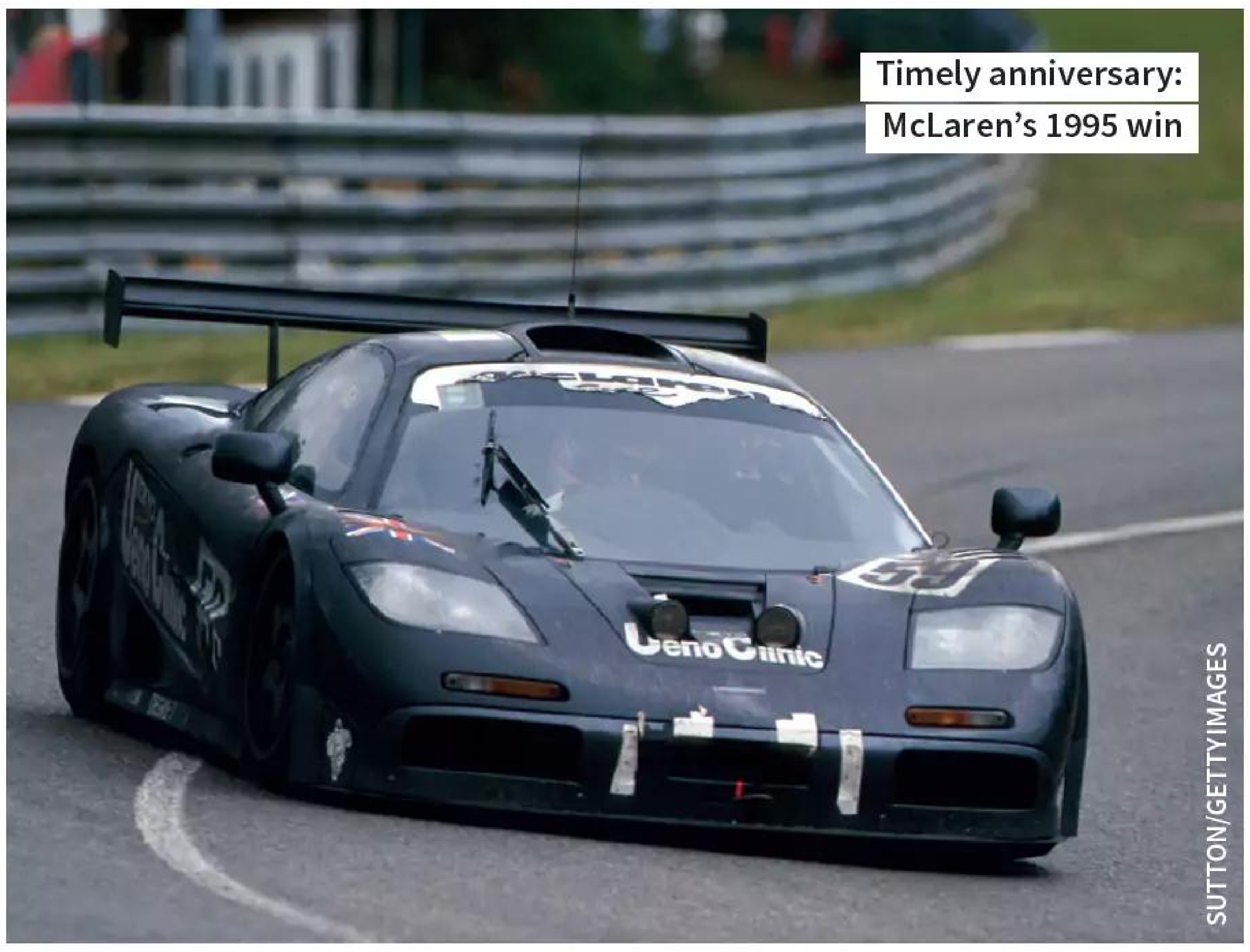
1 **Daniel Juncadella/Jonny Edgar/Ben Keating**
TF Sport
Chevrolet Corvette Z06 GT3.R
287 laps in 10h03m04.050s
Grid 13th (1m56.699s)

2 **Gregoire Saucy/Sebastien Baud/James Cottingham**
United Autosports
McLaren 720S GT3 Evo
+0.493s
Grid 2nd (1m54.478s)

3 **Augusto Farfus/Timur Boguslavskiy/Yasser Shahin**
Team WRT
BMW M4 GT3 Evo
-1 lap
Grid 14th (1m56.869s)

Pole **Giovinazzi** 1m38.359s (123.219mph)

Fastest lap **Pier Guidi** 1m41.259s (119.690mph)



Timely anniversary: McLaren's 1995 win

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

WEC

McLAREN EXPECTED TO TAKE HYPERCAR PLUNGE AT LE MANS

McLaren has given the clearest indication yet that it will soon be competing at the pinnacle of sportscar racing in the World Endurance Championship. Zak Brown, boss of McLaren Racing, hinted on a visit to the Qatar series opener that an announcement could come at the Le Mans 24 Hours in June when McLaren celebrates the 30th anniversary of its victory at the French enduro with the F1 GTR.

Brown revealed that he will be in France on the middle weekend in June and not at the clashing Canadian Grand Prix. "That's a priority for us," he said. "We will have a nice display there in the Le Mans museum and hopefully we will have some exciting stuff to talk about".

The latest comments about a McLaren return to top-level endurance racing follow his revelation at Le Mans last year that it was "more when than if" when questioned about a prototype programme. "I don't think the timing has ever been better," he said in Qatar.

It is understood that the key decisions have been made on a McLaren LMDh programme. Dallara Automobili is set to be the chassis partner, while the engine will have its roots in the twin-turbo V6 already in use in the Artura, introduced in 2022.

GARY WATKINS

WEC

FORD IN SPORTSCAR TOP CLASS FOR THE 'LONG TERM'

Ford is returning to the top flight of sportscar racing for the long haul. That's the message from the US manufacturer's motorsport boss Mark Rushbrook in the wake of its January announcement that from 2027 it will attempt to reprise its Le Mans 24 Hours victories of the 1960s as part of a World Endurance Championship campaign.

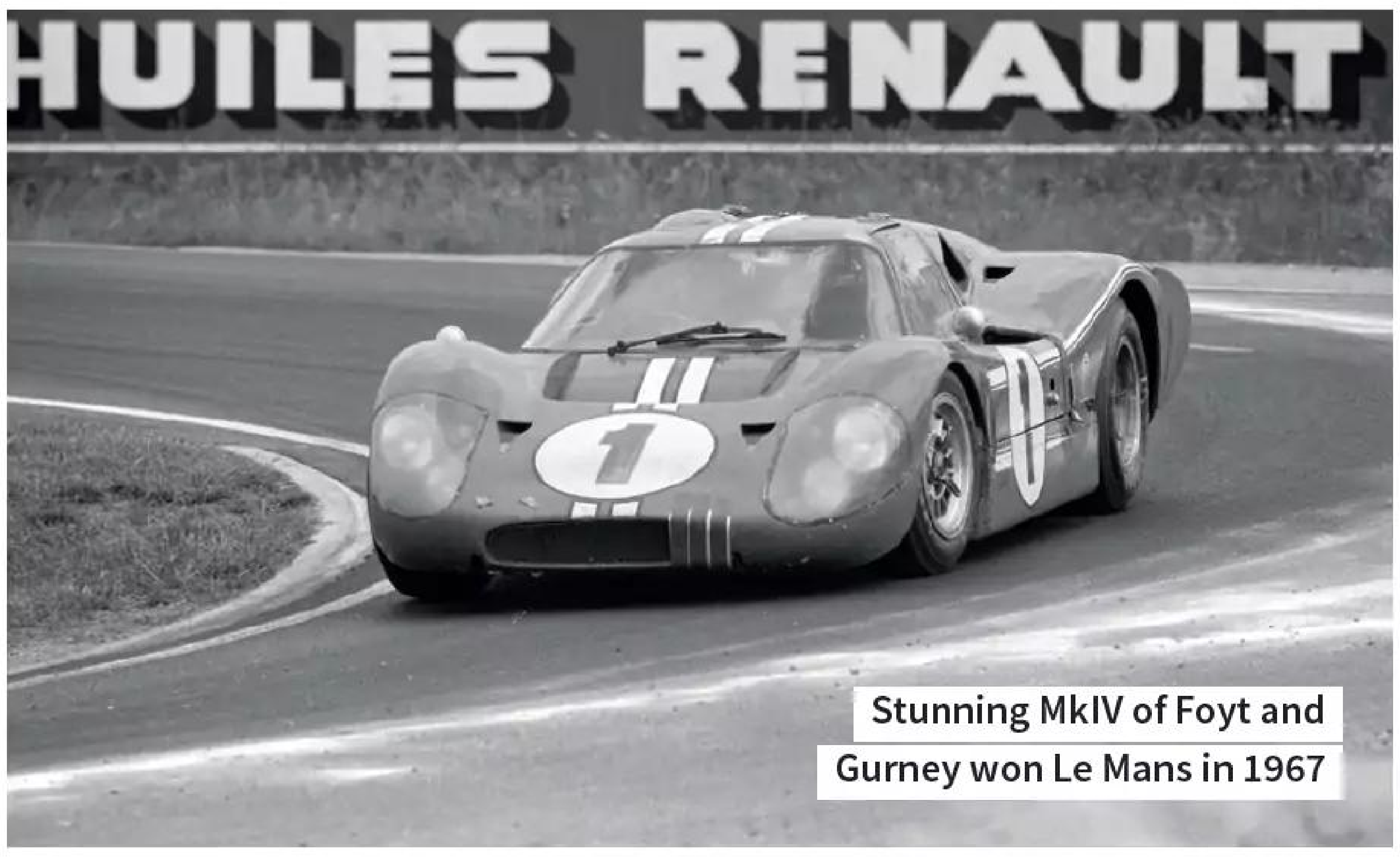
That, for the moment, gives its new LMDh a three-year lifespan up to the end of the current rules cycle, which was extended by two seasons in 2024 up to the end of 2029. But Rushbrook has outlined a vision where Ford remains in the WEC's Hypercar class beyond that.

"All we can commit to at this point is through '29 because that is what the regulations are good for," said Rushbrook. "We will see what happens with those regulations, but I don't see a major departure from where they are today. I think it will end up as a longer-term commitment. All that you see us doing in motorsport is with a long-term vision and commitment."

Rushbrook would not, however, confirm that Ford's LMDh programme will be extended into the IMSA SportsCar Championship. "All we have announced is that we are racing in WEC from 2027 and I wouldn't assume anything beyond that," he said.

Ford has chosen its chassis partner, Rushbrook said, though he declined to confirm that it is ORECA. The concept of the internal combustion component of the powertrain is under final evaluation, he added. It will be designed and developed in-house.

GARY WATKINS



Stunning MkIV of Foyt and Gurney won Le Mans in 1967

SCHLEGELMILCH/GETTY IMAGES

SUNSHINE FOR ALGARVE

Algarve Pro Racing secured title glory in the headlining LMP2 class of the Asian Le Mans Series – and the Le Mans 24 Hours invitation that goes with it – that concluded in February with double-headers in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Malthe Jakobsen was joined by single-seater convert Valerio Rinicella and amateur Michael Jensen in the APR ORECA (left), which took one race win at each of the three rounds.

Photograph by Asian Le Mans Series

GETTY IMAGES

Wayne Taylor Racing will send a Cadillac to Le Mans

LE MANS 24 HOURS

WTR FULFILS AMBITION WITH ENTRY

Wayne Taylor Racing, one of the most successful teams in North American sportscar racing this century, will be crossing the Pond to contest the Le Mans 24 Hours for the first time this June. The winner of the Daytona twice-around-the-clock classic on four occasions has gained a place on the grid as part of a four-car flotilla from Cadillac.

Team boss Wayne Taylor was always open about his aspirations to take the operation he founded in 2007 to Le Mans on its return to Cadillac from Acura for this year's IMSA SportsCar Championship. WTR's maiden Le Mans assault was confirmed at the start of March when the full 62-car entry for the big race was published. It will be an additional Cadillac entry in the Hypercar class along with Action Express Racing, which will be competing in the race for a third consecutive year.

The addition of the two Caddy V-Series.Rs, plus the extra Porsche entry won by the factory Penske team for its victory in last year's IMSA series, brings the Hypercar entry up from the regular 18 cars to 21. That's down two on last year, when there were 19 full-season entries and four extra for the 24 Hours.

WTR has named Ricky and Jordan Taylor, the two sons of Wayne, in its V-Series.R along with Filipe Albuquerque, who has been on the team's books since 2021. Action Express has listed full-season driver Jack Aitken in its entry with Frederik Vesti and Felipe Drugovich.

IMSA regulars Nick Tandy and Felipe Nasr will race the additional Porsche Penske Motorsport entry at Le Mans for a third year. But it will have to bring in a driver from outside the PPM roster for what remains a vacant third seat in the #4 963.

The reduced Hypercar entry has resulted in one more car apiece in LMP2 and LMGT3. There are now 17 cars in the secondary prototype category, up from the 15 pledged by race organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest when the class disappeared from the full WEC schedule.

The P2 field includes the IDEC Sport ORECA fielded together with Hyundai Motorsport as part of its so-called trajectory programme ahead of the start of the Genesis LMDh WEC campaign in 2026. Jamie Chadwick is the only name against the car so far. Ex-Formula 1 driver Logan Sargeant, who was due to race with Chadwick in the European Le Mans Series, has dropped out, IDEC stating that he was stepping "away from the sport to pursue other interests".

The ACO has also revealed a six-car reserve list, which includes a Porsche 963 from Proton Competition.

GARY WATKINS

JEP/GETTY IMAGES

NEW BALLAST SYSTEM HITS LIGHTWEIGHTS

The World Endurance Championship has introduced a new system designed to reduce the advantage of lighter drivers in the series. What is known as compensation ballast was applied to cars across the Hypercar and LMGT3 classes from the opening weekend of the series in Qatar.

Its introduction, which has been under discussion since last year, follows criticism that the performance advantage enjoyed by lighter drivers in Hypercar in particular was not mitigated in any way. A so-called reference weight of 82kg has been set under the new rules, which diverge slightly for qualifying and the race and between the Hypercar and LMGT3 classes.

In Hypercar, a driver will have to carry ballast in qualifying if they are below 82kg complete with full race kit and seat insert. Ballast will be required in the race if the average weight of the car crew of two or three drivers is below 82kg. An average is also being used in qualifying for LMGT3 because the silver-rated driver now drives in the Hyperpole session after the bronze does opening qualifying.

The move has been welcomed in the Hypercar class. Ferrari driver James Calado (above), who revealed last year that he had been hospitalised in his efforts to lose weight, said: "This is definitely the right thing to do – it is only right that a world championship has a rule like this."

GARY WATKINS

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INSIDER

A new sound tops the charts – and Gary Watkins is all ears

Whenever I'm at a race for Autosport, the World Endurance Championship or whatever, I like to get out trackside to get a feel of what the cars are doing. A bit of elevation is always good to enhance my view and the spectacle. Not much chance of that in Qatar, of course: race tracks don't come much flatter or featureless. But I didn't really mind. This time I wasn't out there to watch; I was there to listen.

It wasn't my nose I needed to be pressing to the fence, but an ear. A new car arrived in the WEC's Hypercar class at the 2025 season-opener, and I had to hear the thing in anger. I'm talking about Aston Martin's Valkyrie Le Mans Hypercar, or rather its normally aspirated V12 engine developed specifically for the car by Cosworth.

The drivers have been talking about the sound of the thing for a while now. Harry Tincknell, the first driver to test the Valkyrie in completed form, had been bigging it up. He's not ashamed to admit that he's gone out on track when one of his team-mates at The Heart of Racing team was at the wheel just to listen. And smile, no doubt.

I wasn't disappointed when I took up various vantage – or rather listening – points around the track in Qatar during practice. It sounds the business and is an antidote to the farty turbos that numerically dominate the Hypercar grid. Up to now we've had to make do with Cadillac's 5.5-litre V8 as the only non-turbo in the pack.

Noise is an important element of the appeal of motor racing, at least it always has been for me. My first time at the British Grand Prix came at Brands Hatch in 1978. Sure, the bark of the Cosworth DFV dominated, but I got to hear the Ferrari and Alfa Romeo flat-12s that blocked out the podium that day and Matra's sonorous V12 in the back of the Ligier, not forgetting that newfangled turbo V6 from Renault.

When I was sitting down the bottom of Paddock Hill Bend, I could tell what was coming before it appeared in view. That's the way it should be to my mind, and has been through much of my 30-plus years of reporting on sportscar racing. When I pitched up in the paddock for the first time in 1990, we had Jaguar's big-capacity V12, an array of turbos – including Mercedes' earth-moving twin-turbo V8 and Porsche's flat-six – and a four-rotor Mazda engine.

Think of all the great sportscar powerplants I've had the good fortune to hear at full revs down the Mulsanne Straight over the years: the four-litre V12 in the Ferrari 333 SP, the Judd V10 of various capacities, Mazda's rotaries and any number of V8s and V6s. And I can say I even caught the snatch of the engine note of a W12, the MGN unit in the back of a Norma that never made it out of the paddock in 1990: I heard it fire up and promptly go bang!

In our golden age of sportscar racing we have a grid of cars that all look different, but until now the shame was that they all pretty much sounded the same, save for the Caddy. Of the V8 turbos, the BMW sounds the best, and I'd pick the Toyota as my favourite of the V6s. But I didn't get excited about coming to those conclusions.

I did when Valkyrie went straight to the top of the charts – sorry, Cadillac! – in Qatar. But I'm not done with my trackside trips to marvel at the Valkyrie's engine note. The wide-open expanses of the Lusail International Circuit probably weren't the best place to get your fill of the noise of that V12, especially when the wind was blowing a gale. Somewhere a bit more enclosed, I reckon, would be better.

So I can't wait for the WEC to arrive at Imola in April and then Spa in May. I'm thinking it's got to be Acque Minerali and then Rivazza in Italy and probably Eau Rouge followed by Pouhon when I get to Belgium.

At the double downhill left at Spa, I have a favourite rock on which to sit when I make it out of the paddock, as much to indulge my passion as to try to learn something. But I'm thinking I might this time need to get there early ahead of whatever session I choose for my pilgrimage.

> ***"There's a genuine excitement around the car and that can only help draw fans to the track"***

The arrival of the Valkyrie in the WEC and IMSA SportsCar Championship, in which it will start racing at this month's Sebring 12 Hours, is a major fillip for top-flight sportscar racing. There's a genuine excitement around the car and that can only help draw fans to the track, and eyes and ears around the world to TVs, computers and phones.

There are going to be fans out there with the same idea as me come Spa. Someone might even beat me to that rock.

MAGNUSSEN FINALLY FULFILS HIS DESTINY

A new lease of life in sportscar racing was delayed by a surprise F1 return. Now Kevin Magnussen is ready for an adventure that was always calling him

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

Was Kevin Magnussen going to end up in sportscar racing after the end of his time in Formula 1? Of course he was. It's in his blood after watching and listening to tales of his father Jan's exploits over a 20-plus-year career that included four class victories at the Le Mans 24 Hours. It explains why he's now part of BMW's Hypercar roster with WRT in the World Endurance Championship and was out racing one of the M Hybrid V8 LMDhs at the Daytona 24 Hours, just six weeks after he drew the curtain once and for all on F1 after nine seasons and 185 grand prix starts.

"I always knew that I'd come and do this," smiles Magnussen. "I grew up with it and had a passion for it. I always wanted to be part of it. As a young boy you look up to your dad and want to do what he's been doing."

DOLE

It would be wrong to say that Magnussen grew up in the paddock watching his father race Panoz prototypes and Chevrolet Corvette GT cars. "I was very busy myself," he points out. "I started karting aged two and was eight when I started participating in official races." But before that he was taking part in what he calls "unofficial races" organised by his family.

But he does have vivid memories from his time in the sportscar paddock as a kid. The first is from the Nurburgring in 2000, the second of two European races on the American Le Mans Series schedule either side of Le Mans. It was a good day for the family: his father and David Brabham triumphed in wet conditions aboard their LMP-1 Roadster S. The first Le Mans he remembers is 2003 when Jan raced Team Goh's Audi R8, which wasn't quite such a success, with fourth place together with Seiji Ara and Marco Werner.

Yet for all the family history there is a difference between father and son, one that Magnussen Sr expounded to this author a dozen or so years ago. "I wanted to be a racing driver; Kevin wants to be an F1 driver," he told me when his first-born was dominating Formula Renault 3.5 with DAMS in 2013.

It probably goes a long way to explaining some of the twists and turns in Kevin's career, his stop-start journey to becoming a permanent fixture in the sportscar paddock. More than four years ago, at the end of 2020, he signed with Peugeot as it geared up for entry into the WEC in 2022. Shortly after that he agreed to drive for Chip Ganassi Racing, then recently installed as Cadillac's factory team in the IMSA SportsCar »

GILBERT

Magnussen is relishing “real racing” with BMW

Below left: father and son in Jan’s Corvette days back in 2007

JEP

Magnussen was fifth with Haas at 2022 Bahrain GP

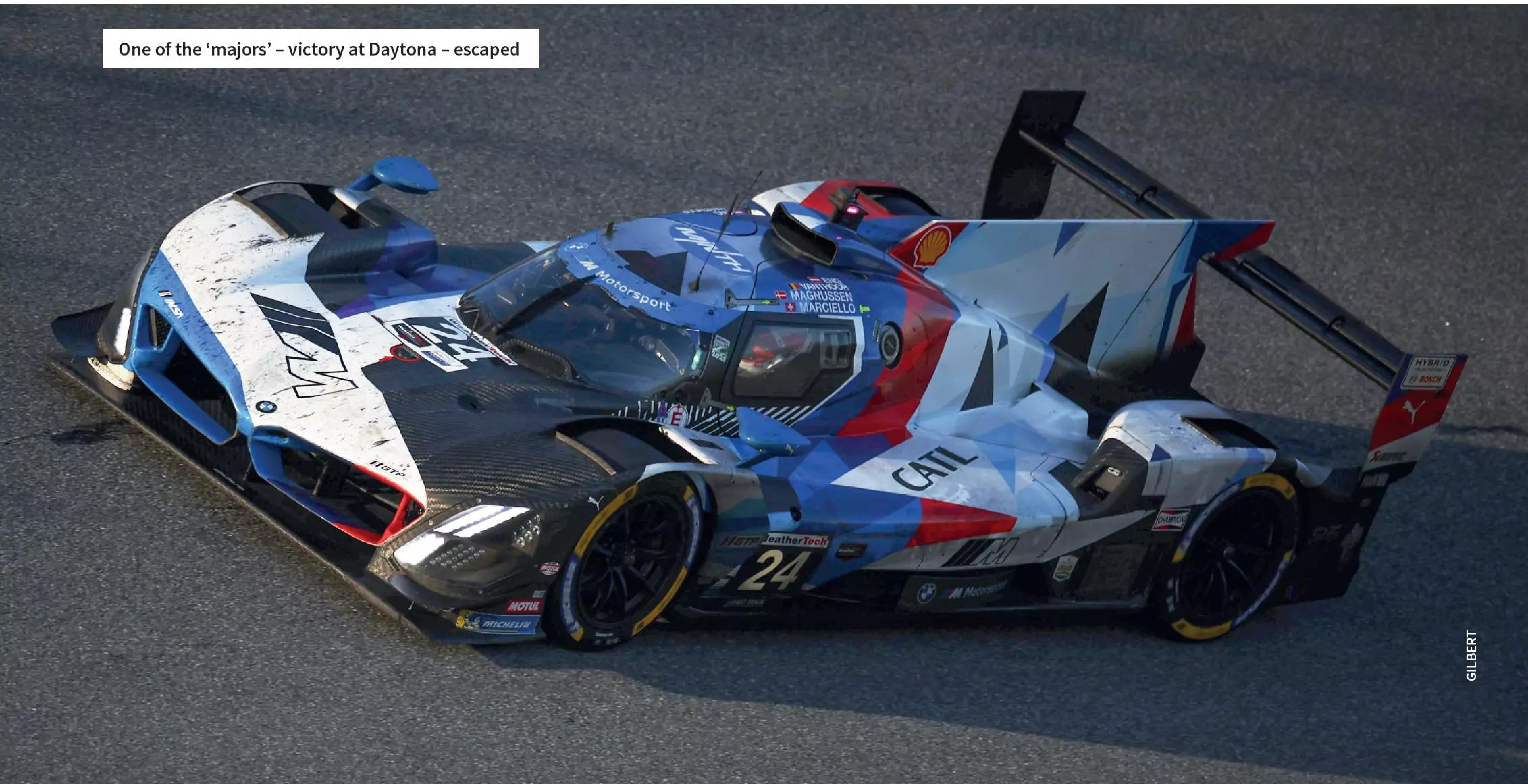
HONE

Last win: Detroit IMSA 2021, with van der Zande (left)

LEVITT

Sharing with Dad in LMP2 (49) at Le Mans in 2021

JEP



One of the 'majors' – victory at Daytona – escaped

GILBERT

Championship, in a full programme of North American events in 2021 aboard its DPi-V.R Daytona Prototype international.

For 2022 he was scheduled to contest the IMSA enduros with Ganassi and however many WEC races Peugeot ended up doing with its new 9X8 Hypercar. He was over F1, he told the world on his first public engagement in Peugeot kit in February. Within weeks he was back with Haas after Nikita Mazepin was dropped following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He insists he wasn't telling a lie: it was how he felt at that time.

"I actually thought I was done with it, thought it was over," he says of F1. And when he heard there might be a seat available back at Haas he "didn't even consider myself for that". But then there was a call from team principal Guenther Steiner.

"He was telling me about the car and the progress they'd made," recalls Magnussen. "He was selling it big time. So I thought OK. Apparently I wasn't fully done with F1 at that time."

Yet that wasn't the first time Magnussen had signed a contract to race a sportscar. Late in 2015 he had a test aboard Porsche's 919 Hybrid LMP1 at Barcelona and was recruited to drive its third entry at Le Mans for the following year: Porsche was looking to repeat the trick that had paid dividends in 2015 when it won the French enduro with Nico Hulkenberg, Nick Tandy and Earl Bamber.

Magnussen was out of F1 at the time. He'd lost his race seat at McLaren after his maiden season of grand prix racing in 2014 and spent a year as its test and reserve driver. But there was nothing on the horizon for 2016. That explains why he put pen to paper with Porsche on a deal, one that fell over in December when, together with sister marque Audi, it scratched its additional entry for the 24 Hours in a cost-cutting move that followed on from the diesel scandal. It was only after Christmas that the opportunity at Renault came up after the French car maker retook ownership of 'Team Enstone' from Lotus.

> "I HAD 10 YEARS OF F1 AND NEVER HAD A CHANCE OF WINNING. IT WEARS YOU DOWN"

The itch to go sportscar racing was definitely there. Magnussen explains that it grew through his time in F1. "My hunger for the more pure side of racing kept growing," he reflects. "I'm very thankful that I got a career in F1, but it's a tough lifestyle. You are away basically the whole year, but a very big part of your year away from your family isn't spent racing. There's a lot of stuff that isn't racing."

Now he is sure that the "F1 chapter is closed for me" and is excited about a move into something he likes to call "real racing". Echoing his father's comments all those years ago, he says: "There are F1 drivers and there are racing drivers."

He may have stepped down from the highest echelon of the sport, but Magnussen is adamant that he's not moving into a less challenging form of racing. "F1 is the biggest, most hyped and most prestigious category of racing, but it is by no means harder than this," he declares. "This is as hard, if not harder because the margins are so close. You need a very broad spectrum of skills and it requires a different mindset, one that makes it more challenging actually. In F1 and single-seaters you are alone in the car and have the whole team around you." It is refreshing, he adds, "not to be part of a one-man show".

When it became clear that F1 was finally over for him, BMW was his first port of call. A "big factor" in that was WRT team boss Vincent Vosse, whom he has known since he was a toddler. Magnussen Sr and Vosse were team-mates at Foundation Racing in British Formula Ford 1600 in 1992, the year of Kevin's birth. Team-mates and also housemates: they lived together in a house in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire owned by team boss Mick Goldney.

"We've always stayed in touch and I've seen his success in sportscars," says Magnussen. "Everything he's done gave me a good feeling." As did what he calls the "good progress shown by BMW" at the end of last year as it moved up the Hypercar pecking order to become a genuine frontrunner. Witness its second-place finish at Fuji last year.

Magnussen is partnered with Dries Vanthoor and Raffaele Marciello in the WEC and, following on from his debut with BMW at Daytona with the Rahal team, will also contest the Sebring 12 Hours this month and the Petit Le Mans season finale at Road Atlanta in October alongside Vanthoor and Philipp Eng. The chance to race in IMSA was important given his family history: "Many of those race tracks are almost mythical to me."

The restart of Magnussen's sportscar career might have yielded a victory at the first time of asking at Daytona. But for a broken nose mounting, he, Vanthoor, Eng and Marciello probably would have won.

"We had the fastest car – we should have won," he says. Winning races is something he's looking forward to doing again: a solo victory at Detroit during his 2021 IMSA campaign alongside Renger van der Zande stands as his only race victory since his championship year in FR3.5.

"That's what it is all about at the end of the day," he reckons. "I did 10 years of F1 and never had the chance of winning. You go to the races not even thinking about winning; you go hoping to get points, dreaming of a top five or something. At the beginning you accept it because it's F1 and you are on that stage. After some time, it wears you down – it becomes a little bit hopeless. Every time we talk about goals and strategy [at BMW], and I see that we are fighting for wins, it reminds me how much I've missed that."

Magnussen, the sportscar driver, has some boxes he wants to tick and will no doubt get the chance at BMW in GT machinery. Racing on the Nurburgring Nordschleife, at Bathurst and Macau (where he competed in F3) are all on his bucket list. And he's already put a line through one: racing at Le Mans with his father. "It was something we had been talking about for a long time," he says of their appearance together at the wheel of an LMP2 ORECA in 2021.

But what Magnussen really wants to do is take the big prizes at the highest levels of sportscar racing. He talks about winning the WEC title and Daytona – they're vying for second place on his ambition list. But he makes no secret of goal number one.

"It has to be Le Mans," he says. "That's the big one."

33
E.Evans
S.Martin
AsahiKASEI
TAMADIC
PIAA
RACING SPIRIT BY UMEÅ.
SafetyCulture
CCi
[FIT-EASY]
TOYOTA GAZOO Racing
JAPAN AIRLINES
NISULA FOREST.COM
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HANKOOK
OMP

KINTO
SCHROTH RACING
DENSO
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Evans keeps a cool head

Toyota star Elfyn Evans's GR Yaris kicks up an icy trail as he maintains position atop the Rally Sweden leaderboard on the opening stage of Saturday morning. Across the four-day event the Welshman demonstrated his mettle under the intense pressure of an unrelenting multi-car fight to claim his 10th career victory, and also the WRC points lead. With this result following his runner-up finish in January's Monte Carlo Rally, he stated: "Very good start, very early days [in the championship] but I don't think you could wish for much better than this." Turn the page to read our rally report.

Photographer Marcin Rybak/
McKlein

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WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 2 • RALLY DEBRIEF

Katsuta fought hard but was denied maiden win

BANKS/McKLEIN

RALLY SWEDEN RESULTS

1 **Elfyn Evans/**
Scott Martin
Toyota Gazoo Racing
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
2h33m39.2s

2 **Takamoto Katsuta/**
Aaron Johnston
Toyota Gazoo Racing
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
+3.8s

3 **Thierry Neuville/**
Martijn Wydaeghe
Hyundai Motorsport
Hyundai i20 N Rally1
+11.9s

POINTS 1 Evans 61;
2 Sebastien Ogier 33;
3 Kalle Rovanpera 31.

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

EVANS DELIVERS STATEMENT OF INTENT WITH VICTORY IN SWEDEN

Elfyn Evans threw down the gauntlet to his World Rally Championship rivals at Rally Sweden last month. The Toyota driver survived an intense pressure-cooker battle to deliver a statement victory, denying team-mate Takamoto Katsuta what would have been an emotional maiden WRC triumph in dramatic circumstances.

Martin and Evans topped five-way fight

BANKS/McKLEIN

Evans's 10th WRC win, which ties him with champions Richard Burns and Ari Vatanen, will be remembered as one of his finest after holding his nerve through a hotly contested five-way fight that included six lead changes. Just 16.8 seconds separated the top four after 183 miles across Sweden's breathtakingly fast snow-and-ice-covered stages.

Opening the road is usually a massive disadvantage in Sweden, but it proved to be "not a disaster", as predicted by de facto championship leader Evans. Conditions were near-perfect, the only unknown the performance of the new Hankook snow tyre. The verdict was that the South Korean firm has produced a hugely reliable tyre, albeit one that requires finessing to achieve ultimate pace.

Evans ended Friday with a slender 0.6s advantage, after Katsuta and Hyundai star Ott Tanak had enjoyed brief spells in front. That lead extended to 8.6s before a brush with a snowbank and a stall reduced the gap to 3s heading into Sunday's three stages. Katsuta blitzed the opening stage and was in the box seat to secure a maiden victory, leading Evans by 4.5s, before the Welshman fought back to take the win by 3.8s. Reigning world champion Thierry Neuville claimed third, 11.9s adrift after a weekend where he was fighting understeer driving the new evolution of the Hyundai i20 N, while Tanak completed the leading quartet after a mechanical issue.

Not only was this a fine victory for Evans, but he also claimed a maximum 35 points by pipping Katsuta to the Sunday classification by 0.8s and the Power Stage by 0.1s. The result moves Evans into a 28-point lead in the championship over part-time Toyota team-mate Sebastien Ogier.

The fight for the victory missed one name everyone expected to be at the forefront. Kalle Rovanpera had salvaged fourth from a difficult Monte Carlo, where he admitted that he needed to change his driving style to adapt to Hankook's new slick tyre. Again he struggled to gel with the new rubber (see p117), leaving Toyota's two-time champion in fifth.

Hyundai newboy Adrien Fourmaux ran as high as second on Friday before an unusual incident halted his charge. The Frenchman wasn't ready for the start of stage 11 and had to stop in the stage to fasten his helmet properly, costing him 23.6s before a crash on stage 13.

Rising star Martins Sesks scored a commendable sixth on his return to the WRC with M-Sport ahead of Sami Pajari, who engaged recovery mode after knocking a tyre off the Toyota's rim in stage two. M-Sport rookie Josh McErlean was on course to finish eighth before a crash on stage 16 handed the position to team-mate Gregoire Munster ahead of the Toyota of WRC2 winner Oliver Solberg.
TOM HOWARD

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INSIDER

Expect Rovanpera to find winning form soon, reckons Tom Howard

"It was in my mind that it was going to be difficult, but I did not expect it to be *this* difficult," mused a disappointed Kalle Rovanpera at the end of a challenging Rally Sweden.

Statements such as this from the two-time World Rally champion, who has rewritten the record books and changed the series' pecking order, are highly unusual. Such have been the performances and incredible feats achieved by the Finn in recent years that the rally world now comes to expect an awful lot from Rovanpera every time he jumps into his Toyota.

While it's far too early for alarm bells to start ringing after only two WRC rounds, it does appear that a change of control tyre manufacturer and the raising of the bar from his opposition may have made the fight for a third world title even tougher. Rovanpera was instantly tipped as the 2025 favourite following confirmation of his full-time return to the championship after a partial 2024 season. The 24-year-old is already the youngest champion (2022) and back-to-back champion (2023) and, even during his campaign last year, he led all seven rallies he contested and won four of them. Rovanpera is a generational talent.

For now, he sits third in the championship, 30 points behind Toyota team-mate and Rally Sweden victor Elfyn Evans, so it's by no means time for panic stations. Even so, few would have predicted Rovanpera to start the year with a fourth in Monte Carlo, followed by a fifth in Sweden, the latter a rally he normally enjoys and where he won in 2022.

Much was expected on the ultra-fast snow-banked roads in Sweden, given this is usually a setting in which Rovanpera thrives. But, like in Monte Carlo, adjusting to the Hankook rubber – this time the studded snow tyre – proved a challenge, something he admitted he'd feared before a wheel had been turned. According to Rovanpera, the tyre requires a style that is not "natural" to him. It must also be said that his road position in Sweden was not the most favourable. "My natural way of driving doesn't work so well and then you are not confident, and then you start to lose some time," he reckoned.

Rovanpera and his Toyota team were able to unlock solutions as the weekend progressed and performances improved, particularly on the narrow and more technical roads, resulting in a fastest time on stage nine. But it was on the wider, faster roads, where drivers have to trust the front end of their cars and commit to corners early, where a lack of confidence resulted in the loss of valuable time. "I would say the biggest difference with this tyre is you have to be patient when you come to the braking and turn-in," explained Toyota team principal Jari-Matti Latvala. "When the car is rotating you have to wait, and then, when the car is straight, you accelerate. You can't drive as aggressively with these tyres than with the previous."

As well as trailing four drivers in the overall results, Rovanpera was fifth in the Super Sunday standings and fourth fastest on the Power Stage. All things considered, it was a decent haul of 13 points from a weekend where he was far from his best. But a lot now hangs on how he will gel with Hankook's gravel tyre, which will make its first appearance in this month's Safari Rally Kenya, the first of nine gravel rallies this year. "I hope it is not like this kind of tyre on gravel, and it is not the same style, but we don't know yet," added Rovanpera. "Now the team and the engineers can do a job comparing all of the data as to where the difference is coming, and hopefully we can understand better."

Such is the standard Rovanpera set while dominating 2022 that questions were raised when he missed out on victory over the first four rounds of 2023. These were answered resoundingly with victory in Portugal, before he went on to win the championship with a round to spare. This could quite easily be repeated, although it does appear that this year could be the most competitive season for a while, with six drivers capable of challenging for victories.

> ***"This mercurial talent always seems to have an answer to any challenge presented"***

But one thing that has been evident is that you should never write off Rovanpera. This mercurial talent always seems to have an answer to any challenge presented. For example, last year he entered Rally Poland with limited preparation, after receiving a last-minute call-up to replace the injured Sebastien Ogier. Rovanpera went on to win the event, scoring nine stage victories in what was one of his finest displays to date, proving that he has the ability to thrive in the most difficult of scenarios.

While all eyes will be on Rovanpera in Kenya, Latvala is confident that his star driver will click with Hankook's gravel tyre, which could prove to be a critical factor in this year's title battle. "I understand that it maybe will be more suitable for Kalle – I think on gravel he will be OK," he predicted.

Rallying to the cause

A new scheme to unearth female talent has unleashed its inaugural winner in the World Rally Championship's WRC Junior class. Time to say ***guten tag*** *to Claire Schonborn*

TOM HOWARD

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Prize win is "unbelievable", but Schonborn knows the hard work starts now

JURTIN / @WORLD / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

The World Rally Championship last year set out on a bold mission to unearth its next female star. This global talent search wasn't purely focused on finding a driver who could perhaps one day follow in the footsteps of the great four-time WRC rally winner Michele Mouton; it was also intended to break down the barriers to entry for women in rallying.

Relatively speaking, the WRC, compared to other motorsport series, has led the way in female participation. Mouton's run to finish runner-up in the 1982 WRC title race smashed the glass ceiling, proving women could achieve success at the very top level of motorsport. Four decades later, this level of success is yet to be replicated, but it doesn't mean the talent isn't out there. On the co-driver side, female participation is growing and so is the success, with Reeta Hamalainen winning the 2022 WRC2 title, while Enni Malkonen competed at the top level last year alongside Sami Pajari after claiming the 2022 WRC3 crown.

Now the WRC hopes it has found a new trailblazing woman driver. Meet Claire Schonborn – the inaugural winner of the WRC's Beyond Rally Women's Driver Development Programme. It's a life-changing moment for the 25-year-old from Germany, who felt that the opportunity for a career as a rally driver was a mere pipedream. After winning a shootout against fellow finalist Lyssia Baudet on February's Rally Sweden, Schonborn will put a career as an automotive systems engineer to one side to become a WRC driver. The prize afforded to her by the WRC is a fully funded programme in the Junior WRC, driving an M-Sport-built Ford Fiesta Rally3 car.

"To be honest it has not completely sunk in it at the moment, but every day I realise it a bit more," reflects Schonborn. "It's unbelievable, but now the hard work starts for the rest of the Junior WRC campaign. Now I have to concentrate completely on this programme because it's such a big chance and honour » to be the winner. I hope the rest of the season will be as good as Sweden.

"Without this programme I wouldn't have had the chance to race rallies, so this was my Plan A, and without this plan I would not be able to continue. This is my whole life now and everything changes. At work I said I had to reduce my working hours and fully focus on this one big chance."

So how did Schonborn reach this life-changing moment? The WRC's concept to increase female participation was born last year. The programme, for which the intention is to run annually, attracted applications from across the world that were whittled down to 15 finalists: Baudet (21, Belgium), Emma Chalvin (23, France), Ann Felke (22, Germany), Joanna Hassoun (20, Lebanon), Mako Hirakawa (27, Japan), Hannah Jakobsson (20, Sweden), Suvi Jyrkiainen (24, Finland), Luz Marina Santos Ramos (18, Spain), Nuria Pons Garcia (21, Spain), Aoife Raftery (23, Ireland), Madelyn Tabor (21, USA), Alexandra Teslovan (18, Romania), Hanna Lisette Aabna (18, Estonia), Dorka Zagyva (19, Hungary) and Schonborn.

This group of drivers of varying age and experience levels and backgrounds headed to M-Sport Poland's headquarters, where they were assessed by a panel of experts. The drivers were judged on their driving capabilities on asphalt and gravel, how they handled media interviews, pacenote making skills, physical fitness and mechanical knowledge by a panel of industry experts, which included Peter Thul (WRC Promoter sporting director), Burcu Cetinkaya (rally driver and FIA Women in Motorsport chairwoman), Pernilla Solberg (FIA WRC Commission president and former rally driver), Maciej Woda (M-Sport Poland managing director) and Isolde Holderied (1994-95 FIA female world rally champion). They assessed the candidates throughout the week before the tough decision to select three winners.

That trio – Schonborn, Baudet and Jyrkiainen – contested the Central European Rally last October driving JWRC-spec Fiesta Rally3 cars. The jury was unable to separate Schonborn and Baudet, prompting a shootout on the snow stages of Sweden. Schonborn, competing on snow for the first time, managed to edge Baudet to finish seventh in the JWRC class, 2m56.3s ahead of the Belgian. JWRC rounds in Portugal, Greece, Finland and Central Europe, where she will be competing against the world's best junior talents, now lie in wait.

> *"Without this I would not be able to continue. This is my whole life now and everything changes"*

GETTY IMAGES

Mouton blazed a trail in the early 1980s

It's clear that a passion for motorsport has fuelled Schonborn for some time. Her parents compete in hillclimbs and she followed them into the discipline, and in order to pay for her motorsport she worked as a race engineer on Porsche Carrera Cup cars at the Nurburgring 24 Hours, the Nurburgring Langstrecken Serie (NLS) and Porsche Sports Cup in Germany. These activities were dovetailed with working as a systems engineer at ZF Friedrichshafen, which supplies technology to road car manufacturers.

"I work on the application of electrical stabilisation programmes in road cars, so it's not an easy job as I have so many business trips, because we are testing in every country including as far away as New Zealand," explains Schonborn. "But my company is fully behind me and they will support me as best as they can. Now I can fully focus on driving and combine what I know from being a race engineer and from my job, and can put everything together."

Schonborn's story does highlight that it is still incredibly challenging for women drivers to break into motorsport at the highest levels, although, in addition to her arrival in JWRC this year, WRC2 will feature an all-female crew with the renowned Iron Dames squad fielding a Citroen C3 for Sarah Rumeau and co-driver Julie Amblard, who finished fifth in the French Rally Championship last year. Schonborn believes that the programme provided by Iron Dames and her own story show that the barriers are coming down.

"It's really expensive to be a rally driver and as a co-driver you can earn money if you do a really good job, so I think it's easier to step in as a co-driver," reckons Schonborn. "But I think it is getting easier [for women to drive] because there are so many programmes like the WRC programme. This is a big chance and I think that is the best way to introduce new female drivers to this sport."

Proud to have earned the right to call herself a WRC driver, Schonborn is under no illusions about the task ahead. After the snow of Sweden, she undertakes her first gravel rally on the brutal and unforgiving roads of Portugal. A daunting prospect but, only four rallies into her career, Schonborn has already proved to be fast, determined and a quick learner.

"I'm really ambitious, so I hope that we can get faster and faster after every stage," she reflects. "I think it will be a big challenge ahead because I have never driven on gravel before, so I have to learn a completely new tyre as well. We need to train a lot and be a bit more confident with the pacenotes as I'm a beginner. My pacenotes are a bit basic, so now we need to focus on getting more into detail. But when I'm focused on something I learn very quickly, so I'm really happy about this.

"Michele Mouton is of course the biggest hero for all the female motorsport drivers, and I hope that now is a new time for a new Michele Mouton of course, but I want to stay realistic. We will go step by step. Sarah Rumeau from the Iron Dames is also one of my heroes at the moment and I can't wait to meet her at a WRC round. Hopefully in a few years I am also someone like them."

German driver had never competed on snow before Rally Sweden shootout

REE / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Seventh-place JWRC finish for Schonborn and co-driver Jara Hain secured the prize

WRC PROMOTER GMBH / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

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Waters can walk on water

Cameron Waters scored a hat-trick of victories with his Tickford Racing Ford at Australia's Supercars season-opener at Sydney Motorsport Park, but the three races couldn't have been more different. Waters dominated the shorter Friday curtain raiser to head home Chaz Mostert by 17 seconds. On Sunday, heavy rain late in the race (left) meant he dialled things back while reigning champion Will Brown beat Mostert to second. Saturday was a thriller. Waters was down in fourth after the final pitstops but passed Mostert and Brown, then contact with leader Broc Feeney forced Waters to hand the position back, only for Feeney's Triple Eight Holden team-mate Brown to join the battle. Waters got the run out of the last turn to pip Feeney by 0.03s, with Brown just 0.20s adrift.

Photographer Daniel Kalisz/ Getty Images

Where Sydney Motorsport Park, Australia
When Sunday 23 February 2025

Details Canon EOS R5m2 RF24-105mm lens, 1/2000th @ F2.8

JEP

BTCC

'FLASH' BACK: SHEDDEN JOINS TOYOTA TEAM

Three-time British Touring Car champion Gordon Shedden is back in the series for this season, and will line up with the Toyota Gazoo Racing UK squad run by Speedworks Motorsport.

The return of the 46-year-old Scot is great news for the series, coming soon after four-time title winner Colin Turkington's announcement that he would not be on the grid for 2025 (see p127).

Similar to Turkington, Shedden's own two-year hiatus was triggered by commercial issues. "Ultimately I stopped because of the Halfords situation at Team Dynamics – it was horrific how late their decision to pull out was," he said. "By that time it was too late for me to get anything else.

"The phone rings every year with a variety of people asking, 'Would you be interested?' But this was different. I always said I'd only go back if it was to something with a genuine opportunity of winning, and the enthusiasm from Toyota themselves has been very flattering."

In lining up alongside Aron Taylor-Smith and fellow Scot Ronan Pearson at Speedworks, Shedden is stepping into the team where his brother-in-law Rory Butcher was a BTCC frontrunner from 2021-23. "Between Christian [Dick, team boss], Danny [Buxton, head of racing] and everything happening at Speedworks, and the insider info from Rory, I know this is the right time and the right place," he said.

"It's almost perfect timing. Now that hybrid is gone from the BTCC, it's going to be very similar to what I'm used to. It's a Neil Brown engine in the Toyota, and almost all my time in touring cars has been with a Neil Brown engine [in the Dynamics Hondas]. And the Corolla is a short-wheelbase car – it's very similar to the Civic in terms of what it is."

While Speedworks is yet to complete a deal for its fourth car, Shedden's arrival has given impetus to the team. "Since I entered into initial discussions with him, the amount of hunger to make this happen has got it over the line," said Buxton. "I've relayed to Christian, 'Do you know what? It's like winding the clock back 20 years! He's the man we want.'"

With Turkington's departure, the West Surrey Racing BMW team has filled its fourth and final seat with Charles Rainford, a former runner-up in the European Ballroom and Latin Dancing Championship and in last year's Porsche Carrera Cup GB. In his rookie BTCC season, the highly rated 26-year-old from Sussex is expected to be a leading contender in the Jack Sears Trophy.

MARCUS SIMMONS

Shedden chases Toyota of brother-in-law Butcher in 2022

JEP

JEP

BTCC

Sponsor blow for PMR Astras

While champions dropping off the grid or returning have made the headlines at the big teams (see left), there have also been developments at the British Touring Car Championship's Independent squads.

The outlook is gloomy for Power Maxed Racing following the ending of its five-year sponsorship contract by Evans Halshaw parent company Pendragon after three seasons. "The unexpected and late decision poses a significant threat to PMR's ability to continue competing in the BTCC in the short term should we not find suitable partners," said team boss Adam Weaver.

While Aron Taylor-Smith, who took PMR's lead Vauxhall Astra to the Indie title in 2024, has landed at Speedworks Motorsport, the management of his former team-mate Mikey Doble are confident that he will find a place on the grid.

One Motorsport has admitted that it will return with Honda Civics after a one-year sabbatical. Josh Cook is in pole position for the lead seat at the two-car team, and it is expected to be with the FK8-model cars used from 2019-21 powered by the customer TOCA engine.

At Restart Racing, Dan Lloyd returns to the BTCC after a year in the Carrera Cup GB to race one of the team's new Excelr8-built Hyundais alongside Chris Smiley.

MARCUS SIMMONS

Daytona: Byron leads Busch (8), Dillon (10), Briscoe (19) and Elliott (9)...

OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR

Byron lords it

The 2025 NASCAR Cup season is off to a wild start with plenty of controversy, hurt feelings and thrilling finishes.

The Daytona 500 played its role well as the crown-jewel event of the series with intense racing from start to finish. On the final lap, Cole Custer pinched the leaders while they were running three-wide for the win, igniting an accident that turned the Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota of Denny Hamlin from the lead. William Byron ran his Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet all the way against the outside wall to avoid the spinning cars, sneaking through and becoming just the fifth driver ever to win back-to-back Daytona 500s.

The finish came under scrutiny due to NASCAR's decision to let the field race back under green despite the massive accident on the backstretch, but the debate over when to push the caution button was about to get even more heated as the series raced into the second round of the year.

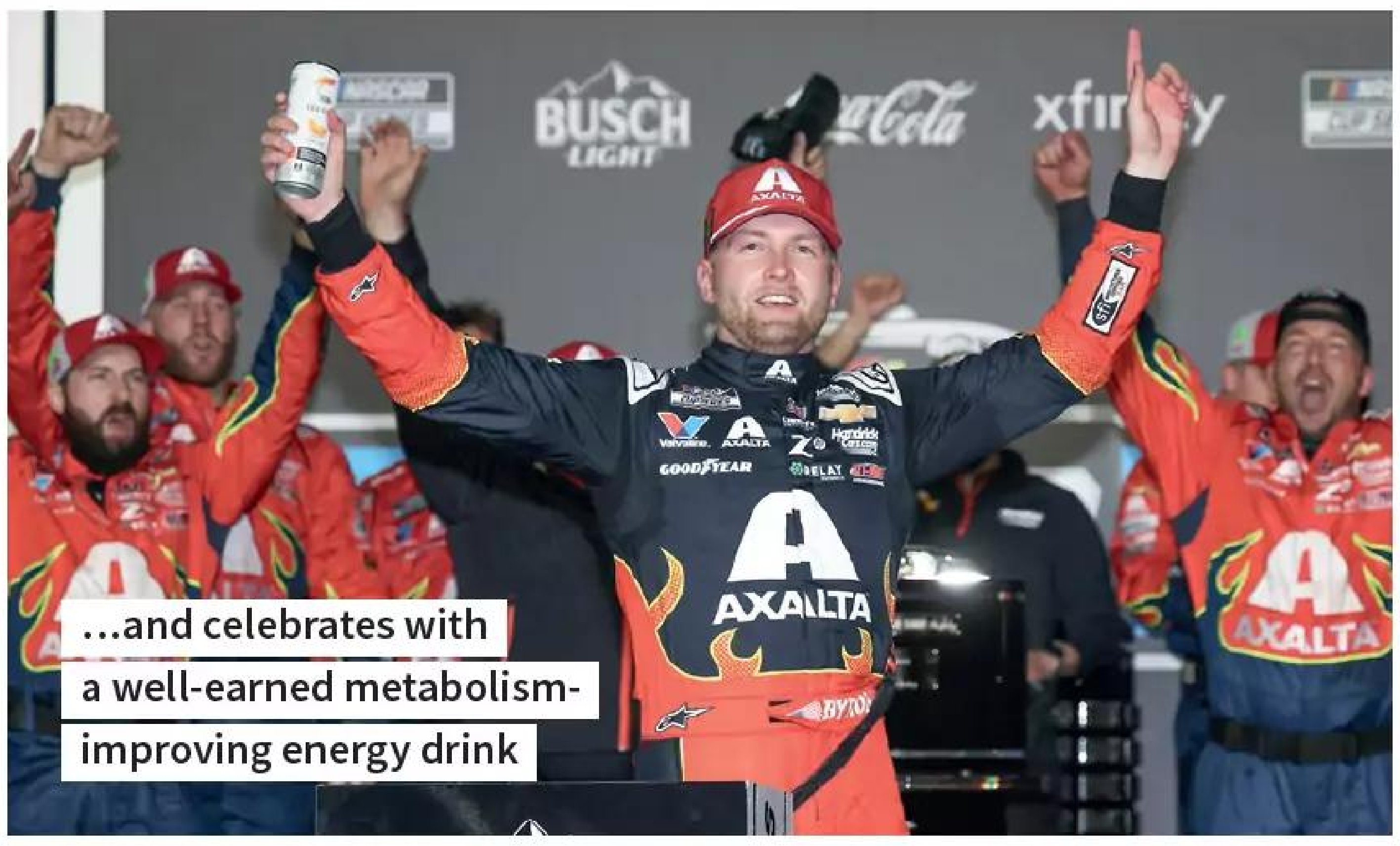
At Atlanta, 2024 Rookie of the Year and NASCAR's newest villain Carson Hocevar made no friends and may have lost a few, frustrating former Cup champions Kyle Busch and Ryan Blaney, as well as his mentor (and also notoriously aggressive) Ross Chastain. Despite all this, his brash driving put him in the perfect position to contend for his first race win.

Entering the final corner, Hocevar wedged himself between Christopher Bell and Kyle Larson in what was set to be a three-wide photo finish for the ages. But NASCAR bowed to recent pressure from outspoken drivers and threw a caution for an incident in the midfield. The decision angered fans and Hocevar too, because his Spire Motorsports Chevy was just behind Bell's JGR Toyota at the moment of yellow.

Leaving behind the pack racing, NASCAR headed to the Circuit of The Americas road course for the third round. The race came down to a thrilling four-way fight for the win as Busch (Richard Childress Racing Chevy) desperately tried to hang on while facing down a 60-race winless streak – the longest of his career. It was not meant to be. Busch burned his tyres off and Bell passed him with five laps to go, fending off a charging Byron.

While Byron and Bell are already locks for the playoffs, there are several drivers already facing a major hole. Among them is Daytona 500 polesitter Chase Briscoe, who has a minus points score following COTA after being hit with a massive penalty when NASCAR found that JGR had tampered with his race car's rear spoiler mount.

NICK DEGROOT



...and celebrates with a well-earned metabolism-improving energy drink

GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

RACE WINNERS 16 February - 2 March

NASCAR CUP SERIES

Daytona 500 16 February

1 **William Byron**
(Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet)
2 **Tyler Reddick**
(23XI Racing Toyota)
3 **Jimmie Johnson**
(Legacy Motor Club Toyota)

Atlanta 23 February

Christopher Bell
(Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota)

Austin 2 March

Christopher Bell
(Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota)

POINTS 1 **Byron** 116; 2 Ryan Blaney 114; 3 Reddick 111.

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Sydney M'sport Park 21-23 February

Races 1, 2 & 3
Cameron Waters
(Tickford Racing Ford)

POINTS 1 **Waters** 315; 2 Will Brown 255; 3 Chaz Mostert 250.

JEP

MORE HEART AND SOUL FROM ROWBOTTOM

The British Touring Car Championship's favourite bearded bad-luck magnet Dan Rowbottom has landed a new two-year deal to keep him at the Alliance Racing-run NAPA Racing squad until the end of 2026. Rowbottom, who has recovered from long-delayed post-season open heart surgery, will therefore line up alongside Ash Sutton and Dan Cammish in the Northampton team's Ford Focus STs in 2025, with a switch to a new car planned for next year.

The much-improved Sam Osborne, son of team owner Pete, also stays on to pilot the fourth of the team's Focuses.

MARCUS SIMMONS

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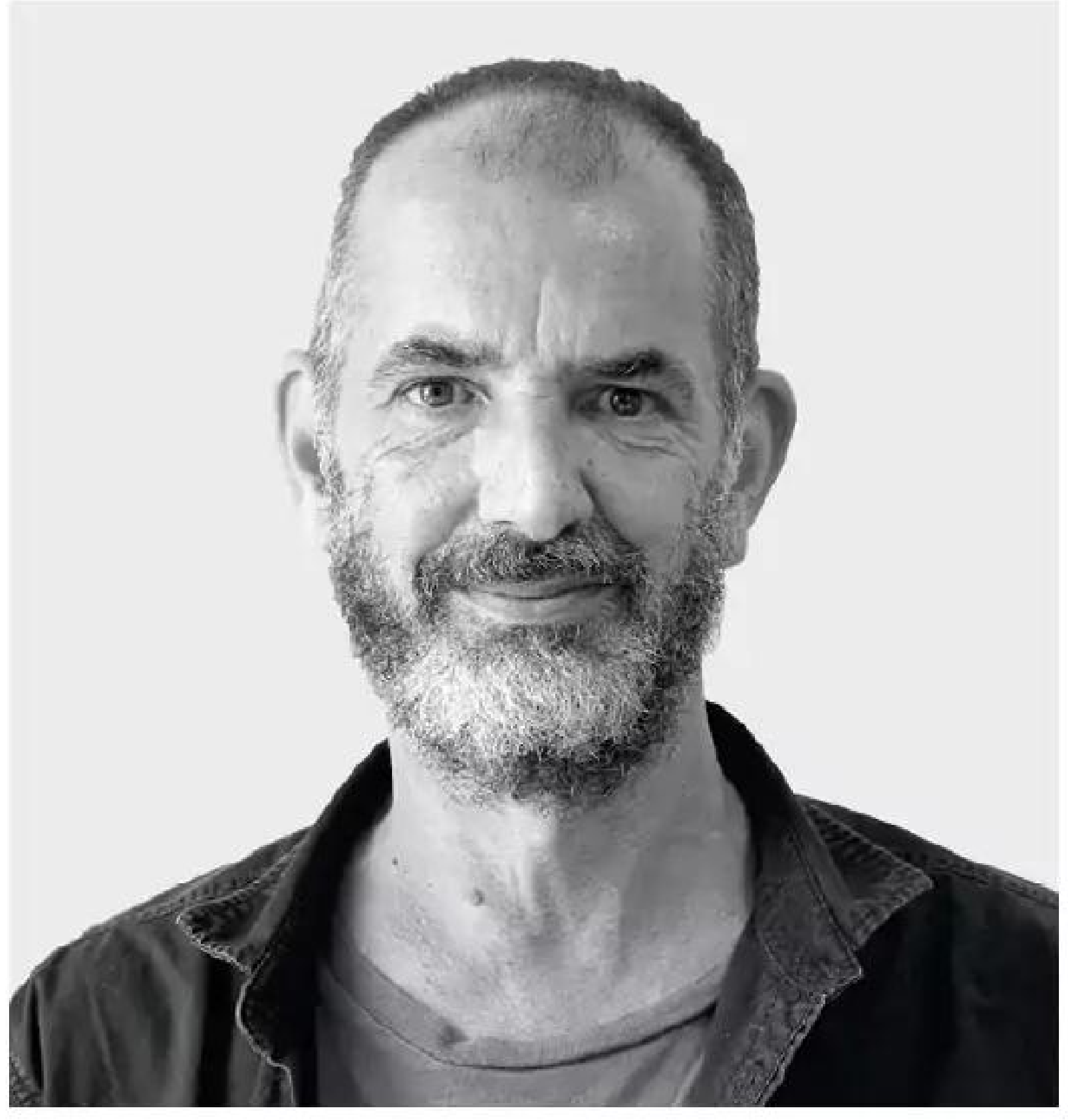


INSIDER

The BTCC will miss Turkington, but Marcus Simmons is optimistic

Colin Turkington will be hugely missed in the British Touring Car Championship in 2025. Not just by the series' aficionados – the four-time champion remains a force, despite not winning the title since 2019. Not just by those who work in the paddock – the easy-going Northern Irish family man is a pleasure to deal with, is very fondly regarded, and is one of the cleanest of racers. But mostly by West Surrey Racing, the team he regrettably leaves behind after 18 years of service.

WSR's association with BMW UK has, of course, been tremendously successful. This continues, but it is widely known that the pressures on the European car industry have forced a trickle-down of cutbacks from the Munich manufacturer on its motorsport activities outside its flagship Le Mans Hypercar programme. "We were well down the road for another good commercial sponsor, but that fell through," explains WSR chief Dick Bennetts. "The UK MD loved the graphics and the idea, but for that amount of money he had to get it signed off by Europe. He sent it off and they said no.

"That's why we said to Colin, 'We can't keep you hanging on too long'. He would make such a fantastic sportscar driver – he's got such a gentle feel for a car and he's still so quick. If you look at his results, he's finished in the top four in the championship in the last eight years [that's 11, if you include his two seasons with Team BMR and his preceding 2014 title with WSR…]. Not many people can say that – even Ash Sutton!

"Colin's no aggro to run at all. A very good guy on and off track – gives accurate feedback, not a crasher, very good with TV and the sponsors."

Is this the end for Turkington in the BTCC? His own statement – the integrity and pathos of which may have been enough to bring a tear to the eye of this middle-aged softy – had a tone of finality. But series ringmaster Alan Gow reckons we haven't seen the last of the 42-year-old. Pop the question to Bennetts about a Turkington return in 2026, and he's enthusiastic about it. "Colin was really looking forward to this year," he states. "We have to look at more commercial sponsors away from the motor industry, although of course we do still have sponsors from that area. We have to look at where the money is now and who wants to support motorsport."

This is against a backdrop of Vauxhall team Power Maxed Racing, heavily reliant upon sponsorship from the car industry, putting out its own statement that things are looking bleak for 2025. In the Midlands team's case, the new American parent company of main sponsor Evans Halshaw has pulled the plug with two years of its contract left to run…

But it's not all doom and gloom. As we lose one champion for 2025, we gain another as three-time title winner Gordon Shedden makes his return at the wheel of a Speedworks Motorsport-run Toyota Corolla (see p124). The Scottish veteran, of course, lost his place in the BTCC for 2023 when his old buddies at Team Dynamics had to change plans because of the loss of sponsorship late in the winter from Halfords. He's been keeping his hand in with historic racing for the past two years, and now the 46-year-old is raring to go again.

And let's not overlook the younger talent that is now on the books at WSR. Reigning champion Jake Hill is the only one of the Sunbury squad's 2024 drivers to remain on board, but incoming Aiden Moffat's best season to date came aboard a rear-wheel-drive car (the Infiniti Q50) in 2021, Daryl DeLeon looked a proper warrior in his rookie season last year in the Un-Limited Motorsport Cupra, and Charles Rainford, the Porsche Carrera Cup GB star who effectively filled the seat for which WSR was hanging onto hopes for Turkington, has a promising – if unconventional – CV (can any readers even older than I tell us who was the last BTCC newcomer to have made his car racing debut in a 1960s Lenham?).

"We think young Charles is going to be good, young Daryl is going to be good, and Aiden had a terrible last year and got disillusioned, but might show his true worth now," predicts Bennetts. "Charles is a bit like Jake – he does a lot of driving in rear-wheel-drive cars and in historic cars [they have even both won races in Group 1 Ford Capris]." And Bennetts also notes that after Stephen Jelley quit his WSR BTCC drive for 2024 and a move back to the Carrera Cup, he finished 11th in a series in which Rainford was second… "We thought Stephen would be at the sharp end of Porsche but he wasn't. That's why we're thinking that Charles will be good. And with Daryl, different people we've spoken to say he's a talented young lad. We might have a headache on our hands with the Jack Sears Trophy…"

> ***"Charles is a bit like Jake – he does a lot of driving in rear-wheel-drive cars and in historic cars"***

We mustn't forget, either, that in 2002 WSR ran a two-car satellite team of MGs with sponsorship from the girl group Atomic Kitten. One of the drivers was a 20-year-old rookie from Portadown who had just won a title in a humble Ford Fiesta. Not a CV for the BTCC cognoscenti to be thrilled about. His name was Colin Turkington.

2004
CHAMPION
DRIVER
CHAMPION
DUNLOP
VAUXHALL
VXRacing
2004 BTCC Champions
James Thompson
Lazenby's British

GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES

Muller leads Plato and Thompson in final race but couldn't stop his team-mate (above) being crowned

J BLOXHAM/GETTY IMAGES

2004 CHAMPIONS
GMAC
www.vxracing.co.uk
btcc.net
www.tripleeight.co.uk
www.seat.co.uk
DUNLOP

ASTRANOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

James Thompson is often overlooked as a BTCC great. But his two titles came against fierce opposition from Vauxhall team-mate Yvan Muller

MARCUS SIMMONS

Twenty-one thousandths of a second. That's the margin by which, in 2004, James Thompson became a two-time title winner in the British Touring Car Championship during what has become an overlooked era in the series' history.

The BTC Touring rules that followed the halcyon big-budget days of Super Touring are guilty of nothing more than being not as epic as what came before. Like New Order evolving out of the ashes of Joy Division, early 2000s BTCC featured many – if not quite all – of the key players from the previous decade, and did produce some fantastic stuff.

Take that 2004 title decider. On its own, third place in the final race at Donington Park would not suffice for Thompson should Yvan Muller, his team-mate in the Triple Eight-run Vauxhall Astra Coupe squad, take the victory. But it would if he also secured the bonus point for fastest lap. "I remember dropping back a little bit because I was third from the start, and tried to put in a couple of really good quick laps and then just basically hope that was good enough," he reflects today. "Once I got fastest lap I just basically stayed there until the end."

Just ahead of Thompson, Muller was facing an attack from his arch-nemesis Jason Plato at the wheel of the lead SEAT Toledo – Super 2000 machinery had also been admitted to the BTCC for 2004. And it was Plato who, the lap after Thompson set his quick time, shaved his own best to just 0.021s adrift. Once the race moved into its middle stages, tyre dropoff would militate against any further improvement and Thompson was safe. Ahead of him, Muller and Plato continued their battle: a series of nerfs from the Englishman; fist-shaking from the Frenchman. "It was quite a good show to be fair – they put on a good spectacle!" chuckles the man who had the best view in the house.

And so, still aged just 30 and now with a second crown to add to his 2002 glory, Thompson headed off for 2005 to the welcoming embrace of Alfa Romeo to line up in a World Touring Car Championship squad that included Gabriele Tarquini, who had taken the youngster under his wing when they partnered each other at Honda during the BTCC's Super Touring purple patch. In fact, of the top seven in that 2004 BTCC, only four of them – Muller, Plato, Matt Neal and a youthful Colin Turkington – would remain on the grid the following year, with Rob Huff joining 'Thommo' in the WTCC and Anthony Reid a victim, like Turkington in 2025, of West Surrey Racing's commercial situation.

That's a great crop of drivers, and Thompson is entirely justified when he points out that, of his intra-team battle with Muller: "Don't forget we're talking about the most successful touring car driver… ever. When you look back now, it was nice to be fighting with him and be as competitive as we were, and winning two out of the three seasons [2002-04] was very rewarding."

That's not something he envisaged when, at the end of 2000, Thompson found himself out of a drive. Honda took only Tarquini of its established stars into the European Touring Car Championship, which continued for one more year with Super Touring in 2001, while the Abt Audi team with which Thompson had contested selected DTM rounds did not keep him on either. Thompson was highly sceptical of BTC Touring, but an opportunity arose to join Triple Eight's satellite team, for which newcomer Phil Bennett had sourced backing from » internet bank – still dial-up in those days! – Egg.

Back in the days when he led the Williams Renault BTCC team, Triple Eight boss Ian Harrison had tried to sign Thompson for the 1997 season – "We got very close to doing it; unfortunately it just didn't happen" – for the seat that eventually went to rookie Plato. Now 'H' and fellow T8 founder Roland Dane had another chance to recruit him, with Muller and Plato driving the works Vauxhalls. "They said, 'Well, we're running four cars this year and if you want there'll be a car there for you with Egg Sport, obviously not the official team'," he recalls. "That was fantastic as it transpired, to have the opportunity to do that first year when things were reasonably thin on the ground. The end of that Super Touring era was a bit of a transitional phase. The main thing was to keep involved."

Bar a largely wet test at Magny-Cours, Thompson had very little time in the car before the season kicked off – hence his third place in a championship dramatically won by Plato over Muller. "It's never easy just to walk in when they [Plato and Muller] have done weeks of testing and developed the car, and that's the way it transpired through the year," he continues. "When you're not familiar with the car you go searching for things that you would have found through the winter. You can't really do that on race weekends successfully over the year."

It all came right in 2002 for Thompson, who had been promoted into the works line-up after the bitter political infighting that resulted in the departure of Plato. But his battle with Muller wasn't decided simply by on-track combat; the five-point penalties for engine changes – a rule thankfully discarded by Alan Gow when he returned to helm the BTCC – provided another variable.

"EVERY TIME I GOT A DECENT LEAD I'D LOSE AN ENGINE. WHEN YOU'RE FIGHTING YVAN, THAT'S DIFFICULT"

Thompson entered the finale at Donington five points clear, but was level with Muller by the time they lined up for the first race: "Every time I got a decent lead I'd lose an engine. Going into the last round at Donington I was five points in front and then I lost an engine, and all of a sudden we're equal on points again. Bearing in mind you're fighting Yvan, that's difficult. Don't get me wrong – he had some bad luck as well."

A slow start to the first race meant Thompson had to grow devil horns – he was usually one of the cleanest racers in the BTCC – to muscle his way past Muller and Neal for victory. In the second and final race, he dropped back from Muller at the start, knowing all he had to do was sit behind, and finally the Alsatian came a cropper with Paul O'Neill, who had stepped into the Egg Vauxhall team for 2002 and is still great pals with Thompson to this day. "There's no point giving anyone any opportunity to nudge you off, is there?" he reasons. "It was my first championship, and so you just do it the easiest way possible."

Muller was on top in 2003, when the series switched from BF Goodrich tyres to Dunlop. BFG parent company Michelin had supplied the rubber with which Thompson had become so familiar in his Super Touring years, so its products would naturally be similar. Over the 2002-03 winter, Thompson focused on chassis development work, while Muller worked on maximising the tyres.

"No disrespect to Dunlop – they were just a very, very different tyre to drive," says Thompson. "The big issue for me was I lost a lot of positivity from the car, especially the front end, so it was very docile to drive. It wasn't a nervous car – you couldn't take it by the scruff of the neck and really drive. You had to sort of sit back, a bit like a Cadillac, and wait for everything to go on, and it really didn't suit me at all. To be honest that whole year was a struggle. Yvan was significantly better than me if you look over the course of the year. It was always a bit of an uphill battle, but he did a great job and he deserved to win it."

Even so, Thompson still claimed six out of 10 pole positions: "I think I was the quickest driver over one lap, on average over the course of the years, except probably 2001, which was a bit of a struggle for me if I'm honest. But in reality they [the poles] were like stolen moments, and I struggled generally with the race. Yvan was so much better at looking after those tyres than I was. I could get one lap out of it, but I couldn't really make it last. And it wasn't until the winter testing for the following year when we managed to change the car significantly to deal with that tyre and help with my style of driving.

"Johnny Morton who was my engineer and the designer as well, he realised that I was struggling. We changed a lot of things on the front end of the car. I was never as comfortable with it as I was with the Goodrich, but it gave me what I needed. Coming from the Super Touring cars which were super-nervous to drive, on a knife-edge all the time, and having driven like that for all those years, I needed a car which was like that. It was like driving on slick tyres in the damp – you're constantly fighting the car and the speed comes with it because the car's generally very neutral, and the minute you have a docile car it starts understeering and you generally can't make it do anything, and that for me is a real problem. Everything was great through the winter, and it translated into results."

And that led to another Donington showdown with Muller. An uncharacteristic Thompson punt on Neal at the Old Hairpin on the first lap of the opener lifted him into the lead, only for Plato to shoulder his way past at Redgate, Muller also chiselling an opening. When Plato hip-checked Muller on the Craner Curves, the Astra bounced down the grass and then shot across Thompson's bows at the Old Hairpin in what was almost a Vauxhall calamity. Muller's runner-up position in the reversed-grid race – newly introduced for 2004 – then closed the gap again, and you know the rest…

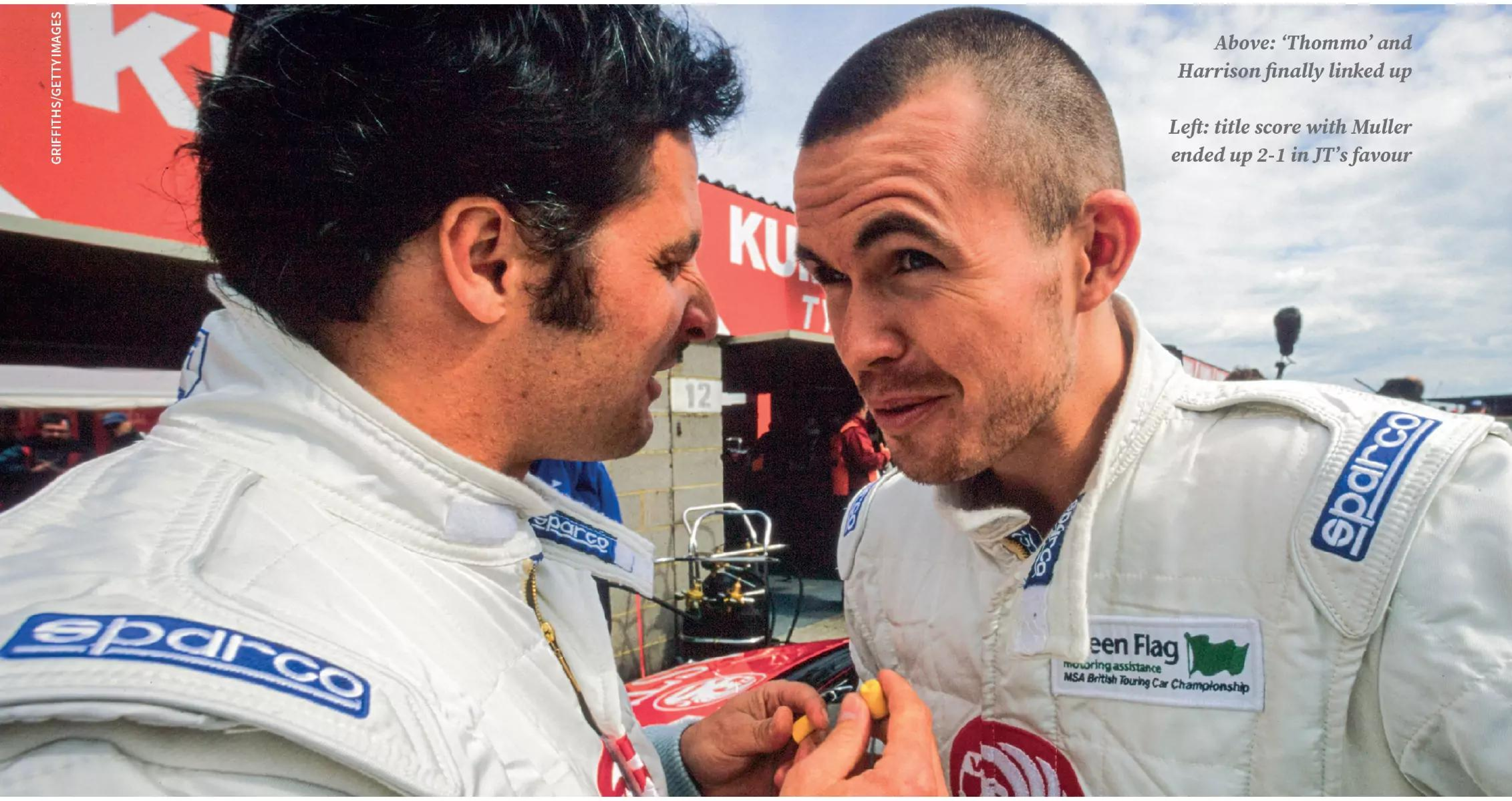
Thompson, speaking from his Ibiza home, laughs when the Neal incident, for which he received a licence endorsement, is mentioned – "I can't remember it to be honest. I'll take your word for it!" – but adds: "I was always relatively clean and I was only penalised once in my career for a driving infringement. You can pretty much think your way past a lot of people. Just good, hard, fair racing I guess. There were villains and all sorts back then. It was a good season. You didn't know which way it was going to go – that was the beauty of it."

Thompson
egg:sport
9
VAUXHALL

JEP

Thompson scrambled Egg deal late in day for 2001

GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES


sparco
Green Flag
motoring assistance
MSA British Touring Car Championship
12

GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES

Above: 'Thommo' and Harrison finally linked up

Left: title score with Muller ended up 2-1 in JT's favour

VAUXHALL
ASTRA
Thompson
Muller
3
2
tocatour.com
BFGoodrich
www.tripleeight.co.uk

First championship for Thompson was in 2002 after another Muller fight

GRIFFITHS/GETTY IMAGES

122
Bonhams Cars
800
DYV
103

All the fun of the Pom

Sporting siblings Simon and Patrick Blakeney-Edwards have long been Vintage Sports-Car Club stars. At Silverstone, Simon beat 120 rivals in cars dating from 1913 to 2023 to claim his first Pomeroy Trophy in his 1929 Frazer Nash Super Sports. He claimed the marque's 13th victory in the multi-discipline event run since 1952 to Laurence Pomeroy Jr's formula devised to determine "the best touring car". Four-time 'Pom' winner Patrick B-E (1964 Austin-Healey 3000, left) scrapped with Duncan Pittaway (1965 Plymouth Barracuda) and feisty debutant Lewis Packham (2017 BMW M140i) in the best of three concluding 40-minute High Speed Trials on the Grand Prix circuit and prevailed.

Photographer Steve Hindle

Where Silverstone, Northants, UK
When Saturday 22 February 2025

JEP

JEP

Beecroft says a rethink was needed for 2026

TOCA JUNIOR

TOCA Junior on ice for 2025

Lack of interest from teams in fledgling BTCC support series means it will instead adopt new format for launch next year

The new TOCA Junior championship will not be held in 2025 and instead is intended to launch next year under a revised format where all cars would be centrally run.

The category was set to begin this year and act as a replacement for Ginetta Junior at British Touring Car Championship events after the Yorkshire manufacturer decided to switch its portfolio to the British GT package from 2023.

TOCA Junior was due to feature a new, bespoke rear-wheel-drive tin-top – christened the Chevron B1417 – but struggled to attract entries amid the car costing £78,500+VAT. But, despite a wealth of successful teams from across national motorsport attending the championship's official launch last August, only two – Porsche/Mini squad Graves Motorsport and sportscar operation Toro Verde – officially pledged support.

Organisers were therefore forced into a rethink and have opted to go down the route of taking the operation of all the cars in-house for 2026 in a bid to reduce costs.

"The parents I've spoken to all like this idea because they don't have to negotiate with teams," explained series director Dave Beecroft, who has experience of centrally run categories as an engineer in the SEAT Cupra Championship that supported the BTCC in the mid-2000s.

"You can't 'chequebook' it with doing lots of testing because we can control the testing – it massively reduces the costs.

"I think if we had gone down this route in the first place, we would have had a lot of interest. When you look at it from a cost point of view, it makes so much more sense."

Despite the setback, Beecroft still believes the championship has the potential to be a success. He said the decision to focus on 2026, instead of trying to revamp the offering for this year, enables another group of teenagers to be targeted. "We've got a year to market and promote it to the karters," added Beecroft.

The decision to postpone the championship's launch leaves a sizeable hole in the BTCC schedules since TOCA Junior was due to appear at all 10 events. A variety of guest club series have enjoyed a slice of the TOCA limelight in recent seasons but, with calendars already locked in, BTCC boss Alan Gow has said there will not be major tweaks.

"It's obviously too late to put in any replacements," he said. "People aren't going to change their calendars in February or March – it's too late in everyone's diary to do that. It just takes a bit of pressure off a raceday, and it doesn't create a major problem because we have all our other great support races."

When asked if there was the possibility of a one-off event being added to the schedule later in the season, Gow responded: "Perhaps. I'm always open to that."

Established support series British Formula 4, Porsche Carrera Cup GB, Porsche Sprint Challenge GB and Mini Challenge will continue to run alongside the BTCC. Sole appearances from the top-tier Caterham Seven UK championship and Legends were already planned at Brands Hatch and Croft respectively.

STEPHEN LICKORISH & MARCUS SIMMONS

Title-winning Skyline from 1990 will makes its UK event debut

STEVE RITCHIE

GOODWOOD FESTIVAL OF SPEED

RICHARDS TO DRIVE HIS DAD'S NISSAN AT FoS

Jim Richards's 1990 Australian Touring Car title-winning Nissan Skyline GTS-R will make its UK debut this summer, with his son Steven taking the wheel at the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

The HR31 model, replaced by the better known R32 for the title run-in, is among a number of Group A cars based in Australia and New Zealand that will be in action at Goodwood or Brands Hatch's Super Touring Power 3.

Four-time champion Richards Sr took the straight-six turbocharged car to two wins in the first four races of 1990, before adding another after switching to the R32. Now owned by Kiwi Peter Sturgeon, the HR31 still resides at Richards's Melbourne base.

"Jim thinks it's probably the best balanced car he's driven," said Sturgeon. "And Steve [a five-time Bathurst winner] is the only one that I'll let drive it. I think it's lovely that Steve can drive his father's championship-winning car."

Richards will be joined at Goodwood in July by regular sparring partner Greg Murphy in the Holden Monaro in which Murphy took the 2003 Bathurst 24 Hours victory.

Group A machines heading to Brands Hatch a fortnight earlier include an ex-Denny Hulme Rover Vitesse and a storied Ford Sierra RS500. Making its first return to Europe, Allan Dippie's Rover is an 'evolution' model built by Tom Walkinshaw Racing for the 1986 European Touring Car season. Armin Hahne and Win Percy scored victory at the Osterreichring, while Hahne was joined by Jeff Allam and 1967 Formula 1 champion Hulme for the Spa 24 Hours. The car was retired at season-end, and later shipped to New Zealand by TWR engine manager Allan Scott.

"I think that's why Allan thought it was a good car to bring home, because it was the one that Denny raced so it had that Kiwi connection," explained Dippie, who races the Bastos-liveried car down under. "It's probably one of the most original ones because it's never been restored."

The Peanut Slab RS500 of Scott O'Donnell was built for the 1988 ETC by Wolf Racing in Germany before it was piloted by Robb Gravett and Gianfranco Brancatelli. O'Donnell's ex-Claudia Hurtgen 1995 STW Ford Mondeo is among six New Zealand-based Super Tourers heading to Brands. They include Sturgeon's newly restored ex-David Leslie Honda Accord and a second visit for his Dynamics Nissan Primera, to be driven by Kayne Scott and Michael Lyons.

MARK PAULSON

Sturgeon's Primera will again appear at Super Touring Power

JEP

PORSCHE

GAMBLE TO DEFEND HIS CARRERA CUP CROWN

Reigning Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion George Gamble will bid for the title again this year, joined by race winner Andrew Rackstraw in the Century Motorsport line-up.

Gamble was victorious in a four-way decider upon his first season back in Porsches in 2024, after spending the previous two years in British Touring Cars. Autosport reported last year that Gamble was considering staying in the series, and he has indeed now decided to attempt to become the first back-to-back champion since Dan Cammish nearly a decade ago.

"We had a pretty exciting year last year with it going down to the wire but, coming from the front-wheel-drive Toyota to the Porsche, it did take a few rounds to get back into it," said Gamble, who added that being the reigning champion does add "extra pressure". "This year I'm hoping to start where we left off. It's a bit of a dream since I was a kid to race with the number 1 on the side – it's pretty cool.

"I looked at other stuff but I really fancied another crack at it. With other commitments, it suits me being in the UK and I enjoy being on the TOCA package."

South African Rackstraw – who was runner-up in last year's Walter Hayes Trophy as he dovetailed Formula Ford with sportscars – finished eighth in the 2024 standings with JTR. Pro-Am champion Angus Whiteside is also stepping up to the top Pro division and will remain with Century.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Just 13 cars raced in Historic FF1600 at Snetterton last year; this season it should be over 30

RICHARD STYLES

HISTORICS

HISTORIC FF1600 SET FOR MUCH LARGER GRIDS

Historic Formula Ford 1600 is set for a transformation in fortunes this year with 31 entries already received for the championship's Snetterton opener in mid-April, in stark contrast to the 13 cars that competed in Norfolk last season.

With multiple newcomers signing up – including promising youngsters chasing the Novice Cup initiative – and others set to join at subsequent rounds, the qualifying races of yesteryear could return.

Internal management changes, with former Historic Sports Car Club chairman Chris Sharples taking over the category's reins, have re-energised racers, largely by driving entry fees down. There was much to do when Sharples voluntarily tried to turn things around. After only 13 cars raced at Snetterton, it fell to 10 at Cadwell Park and was 14 at Donington.

Classic FF1600 sponsor SDC's pledge to rebate competitors in the pre-1982 series inadvertently hit Historic grids. Indeed, Benn Simms was champion in his Historic Jomo over a field that averaged 26 cars.

Rising circuit track time costs also stunted growth, particularly since the coronavirus pandemic. Greater Historic customer demand, however, has made negotiation of lower entry fees feasible, hence racers will pay £100-£200 less per event in 2025.

"Reducing entry fees has generated momentum and got people talking about HFF again," said Sharples. "Six cars changed hands over the winter and more movements are in the pipeline.

"There is a real buzz about it. Apart from many newcomers, competitors returning and bringing cars out of garages augurs well as we build towards FFord's 60th anniversary in 2027."

Among those planning to make series debuts this season are Racing Bulls F1 engineer Andy Boulet (Alexis), Jensen Fennymore in the Merlyn Mk20 of his Historic FF2000 title-winning father Graham, Ed Lillington-Price and George Townsend (Merlyns) and Gareth Jones in Bill Cowing's Nike.

Meanwhile, the rare Javelin JL5 FF1600 in which the young Nigel Mansell first showed his potential in 1977 was back on show at Race Retro after a significant rebuild. The Javelin is now owned by Martin Sismey, who hopes to get it back on track again this year, when it could race in Classic FF1600.

MARCUS PYE

Rare Javelin that Mansell raced could return to action this year

BEN LAWRENCE

GARY HAWKINS

HISTORICS

COLBURN'S NEW SINGLE-SEATER BID

Tin-top and sportscar racer Ben Colburn will tackle a new challenge this year when he competes in single-seaters for the first time, with a Historic Formula 3 campaign planned in a Merlyn Mk10/14.

Colburn has raced a variety of historic and modern machinery with the family Westbourne squad, including taking the 2015 Junior Saloons title. But he had never driven a single-seater until testing the Merlyn at Brands Hatch in February (above).

"I think I've definitely got some respect for those drivers who drove single-seaters – the sense of speed is quite phenomenal," he said. "In terms of cars I've driven previously, the only thing I can try to relate it to is the Lenham Sprite because they're quite light and powerful. I will do a bit more testing and it will be really interesting to see where we can go."

The car has an interesting past, including being raced in an F3 class within the international F2 event at Keimola in Finland in 1967 by Jonas Qvarnstrom – a contest where Jim Clark, Jochen Rindt and Graham Hill finished on the podium. "It's nice it's got that bit of history," added Colburn, who plans to enter a mixture of British and European races in the car.

Meanwhile, Westbourne has confirmed its Mini Challenge Trophy runner-up Sam Gornall will switch to the Clio Cup GB this year.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

HONDA
BRIDGER MOTORSPORT

Bridger Motorsport is bringing Honda back to British GT

BRITISH GT

HONDA BACK IN UK GT RANKS WITH NSX GT3

Honda is the latest manufacturer to return to the British GT Championship this season, with the NSX GT3 set to make its series debut 18 years after the Japanese marque was last represented on the grid.

Honda powered the Lotus Exige GT3s of Mackintosh Motorsport and Cadena Motorsport in 2007, while it has not had a car in British GT since the 1990s. It joins Ferrari in being represented in the GT3 ranks once more.

The NSX will be run by series debutant Bridger Motorsport, which has contested UK single-seater championships since its inception in 2015, and is supported by Honda development partner JAS Motorsport.

"We are very excited to be joining British GT with Honda this year," said team boss Jay Bridger, whose squad only has sportscar experience at GT4 level. "It is a massive jump up for us as a team. We are working alongside JAS Motorsport and their support has been very valuable to us.

"It will be a big learning experience for everyone. We are running the only Honda on the grid so we will have a lot of catching up to do. But testing has exceeded our expectations and we have put a good team in place around us. It will also be a big step up for our drivers, but I have a lot of confidence in our line-up."

The Honda will be driven by two GT3 debutants: Ginetta racer Luke Garlick and Johnny Ip, who competed for Bridger in last year's British Endurance Championship and in Monoposto.

Elsewhere, last year's GT4 champion Jack Brown stays on aboard an Optimum Motorsport McLaren Artura to bid for a second crown. He will be partnered by Marc Warren, one of his 2024 title rivals who moves across from a Forsetti-run Aston Martin. "Jack and Optimum have set the benchmarks for GT4 and I need to up my game to perform at the very highest level with them," said Warren.

Another British GT4 conqueror on the grid this year will be 2018 champion Jack Mitchell. He last contested a full British GT season in 2020 but is now making a comeback as part of an expanded squad of Mahiki Racing Lotus Emiras alongside Steven Lake. Former British GT frontrunner Joe Osborne has been appointed as the squad's new team manager.

ED HARDY

P140 WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO

XPEL
HOOKFLASH
OPTIMUM
90
PIRELLI

Brown will bid for a second GT4 crown

JEP

GB4 FOR McLAREN F1 DRIVERS' SONS

The sons of two 1990s McLaren Formula 1 drivers will both compete in GB4 this year. Luca Magnussen and Dayton Coulthard (above) – offspring of Jan and David – will make their car racing debuts with Fortec Motorsport and Douglas Motorsport respectively.

TEST DRIVE PRIZES FOR CHAMPIONS

Several test drive prizes have been announced for tin-top champions. The three TCR UK class conquerors will get to sample Power Maxed Racing's Vauxhall British Touring Car. Meanwhile, the champions of the 750 Motor Club's Hot Hatch and Clio Sport contests join the Civic Cup winner in sampling a TCR car.

TCR UK BACK TO ITS ORIGINAL CALENDAR

TCR UK will now not visit Spa on 17-18 May, instead reverting to the originally scheduled Silverstone event that weekend. The change is part of a raft of cost-cutting tweaks. Full-season entry fees have been capped at £5000, while new tyre allocations for double-headers are reduced from six to four.

WERA ACADEMY MOVES INTO MINIS

The Wera Alliance Racing Academy will move into the Mini Challenge Trophy this season. Existing members Jenson Mason and Alfie Garford – Fiesta Junior winners last year – will progress into Coopers and will be joined by racing rookie Murray Richardson at some events.

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JOBS

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- Support the Senior team with contract renewals for the brands in your portfolio

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MOTORSPORT PLANNING AND EVENTS COORDINATOR

Pirelli

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INSIDER

Marcus Pye on Guernsey cream: the Priaulx legacy

The Bailiwick of Guernsey, second largest of the Channel Islands, anchored off France's Normandy coast, is famous for dairy farming, tomato crops and producing a wealth of world class sportspeople. Deeply rooted in the UK protectorate's fertile soil, all say much for the fierce determination of its 65,000 population.

Proud flagbearer Andy Priaulx inscribed Guernsey onto the motorsport map. As European Touring Car champion with BMW, he netted the first of three successive World crowns in 2005, overcoming extraordinary odds anew with Belgium's Racing Bart Mampaey squad. But the Priaulx family's impact already spanned four disciplines over half a century, and two previous generations of tough, wiry men with unbreakable spirit.

Andy's grandfather Ernold 'Skip' Priaulx was a pioneer motor trader. Following the islands' liberation from German occupation post-Second World War, his vision, self-belief, tenacity and work ethic earned rewards. "Skip started Forest Road Garage from nothing, building walls, putting up rafters," says Andy. "He took on the Fiat agency and sold more 500s in one year than any dealer in the south of England. Later, he added Alfa Romeo and Mazda."

Dapper Skip was a big character who enjoyed the local sand racing tradition, in the 'Flying Banana', a home-brewed special. Graham, the eldest of three sons who joined the business and who died in February aged 82, was initially enthralled by the water as many islanders are. He raced powerboats and – after a Cowes-Torquay-Cowes drama – mono-skied the 27 miles from Guernsey to Jersey behind his dad's boat at record-breaking speed.

Back on terra firma, Graham took up hillclimbing in an uprated Sports 2000 Tiga, self-prepared with Andy initially as chief polisher. Ever immaculate, the light and wieldy red machine, powered by a two-litre Ford BDX engine running on methanol and nitro, was effective too. In 1984 'GP' set the Channel Islanders' outright record at Val des Terres, a British Championship venue since 1973, which rises from the seafront at St Peter Port. It stood for 11 years, Andy breaking it in landing the 1995 crown in the four-litre Pilbeam-Cosworth DFL MP58/03.

When the family garage was sold, Graham established a successful car sales business near the hill, where Andy prepped and valeted the stock. He had raced boats and in motocross, before hillclimbing beckoned. Two double-driven Mallocks taught Andy well, before they switched to single-seaters with the well-travelled 2.8-litre Pilbeam-Hart MP57/02, originally Team Guyson's in 1986.

Scholars of the accelerative no-blinking discipline know, but casual observers may have forgotten, how capable Graham was. He won two national round run-offs, beating the rain at Wiscombe Park in Devon in the spring of 1994 – where Andy scored his maiden victory that autumn – and repeating at super-fast Shelsley Walsh, birthplace of modern hillclimbing in 1905, in the 575bhp MP58/03 in June 1995.

That season was sensational. As Andy gunned for glory in the MP58, the responsibility of running ahead and not breaking the car did not blunt GP's performances. Andy demoralised his opposition over the summer, winning 10 rounds (a maximum score unseen since Roy Lane's F5000 McRae GM1 season of 1975), with Graham taking over his son's fourth position of 1994.

With 13 top-class hillclimb victories on his CV, Andy followed his passion and went circuit racing, with the blessing of his family, fiancee Jo Le Tocq and loyal supporter Tim Thomson. He monopolised the 1999 Renault Spider Cup, then resumed a precariously rocky and woefully underfinanced F3 career.

Many times the dream looked over, yet it was realised in touring cars. Now Andy's son Sebastian, 24, represents the fourth generation and carries the mantle forward with typical Priaulx panache and family values. The inaugural Porsche Carrera Cup North America champion has achieved two World Endurance Championship class wins and three Daytona 24 Hours class podiums, most recently this January with Multimatic's Ford Mustang GT3.

> ***"Skip was a big character who enjoyed the local sand racing tradition, in the 'Flying Banana'"***

Although great-grandfather Ernold died in 1998, prepping his boat, nobody was prouder than grandad Graham, who had battled Parkinson's Disease since 2003, supported by his wife of 57 years Judy. When Seb was born, early, in January 2001, new mum Jo and GP set up the Priaulx Premature Baby Foundation charity, a priceless lifeline to countless Guernsey families.

As Andy reflected on his father's legacy before his funeral, which filled the parish church at St Martins: "GP was a strong man, a perfectionist, and a hero to me, Fi [his sister] and the family. Everybody loved him. But as he always said: 'It's nice to be important, but more important to be nice.'"

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO

With the new season just getting under way, here are some of the standout events and battles to watch in UK motorsport this year

BEGINS 5-6 APRIL

A CLOSER BRITISH GT FIGHT AND FERRARI REJOINING THE FRAY

The 2024 British GT campaign featured one of the most dominant performances from a team in recent history. Barwell Motorsport clinched the title at the penultimate round and the Lamborghini squad won five of the nine races, which even took team boss Mark Lemmer by surprise.

But there will be a few changes for this season at Barwell, so it will be very exciting to see how the dynamic plays out. In the #1 Huracan is reigning champion Rob Collard, who is striving to become the first amateur – a so-called 'amateur' with 15 British Touring Car race wins, it must be noted – to claim three series titles, yet he will be joined by the inexperienced Hugo Cook and not son Ricky, with whom he won the 2024 drivers' crown.

Cook contested his rookie campaign only last year, finishing 13th for Audi team J&S Racing. So it's a huge jump for the 20-year-old, who took the 2023 GT Cup crown, to line up alongside the reigning champion at the best squad in the series. Will he handle the pressure?

It could even be argued that the fastest Huracan failed to win the 2024 title: Alex Martin and Sandy Mitchell won more races than the Collards, yet a penalty at Snetterton, retirement at Silverstone and puncture at Donington Park led to this pairing finishing runner-up.

Redemption is therefore the aim for the other car in Barwell's garage. It will have to be done without Mitchell at Silverstone, Spa and Brands Hatch though, since the factory Lambo ace is unavailable for those rounds, so in his place will be Patrick Kujala, whose most recent British GT campaign was 2020.

Mitchell was the series' standout driver last year and almost dragged Martin to the title, so how Martin fares with Kujala will determine whether he has improved from an inconsistent season in 2024.

What should also be exciting is seeing who can dethrone Barwell, which enters its final year with the Huracan before switching to the new Temerario model.

The fairytale story will be Ferrari squad AF Corse, the Italian marque returning after being absent from the championship for five years. The team, which will run the 296 GT3 under its Spirit of Race banner, has an

JEP

experienced line-up to boast in the form of Duncan Cameron and Matt Griffin, who have six series wins together and finished third in the 2010 standings. So all the elements are there for an intense battle between the top two Italian manufacturers in Britain's top GT series – how great would that be?

Something else to look out for is the new Endurance Cup, which is essentially a championship within a championship reserved for GT4 crews at the calendar's biggest circuits.

ED HARDY

BEGINS 26-27 APRIL

AGGRESSIVE NEW CAR ADDING TO GB3'S APPEAL

A brand-new car, more teams, and the addition of Monza to the calendar for the first time are a signal of intent as the GB3 Championship aims to reach new heights in 2025.

The Tatuus MSV GB3-025 is expected to be significantly faster than its predecessor, thanks to a fully revised chassis, Formula 1-inspired aerodynamics generating up to 35% more downforce, and a new Mountune engine producing an extra 30bhp. The introduction of a Drag Reduction System will also add another dynamic to the races.

Monza will host the season finale and is one of five current F1 venues on the calendar, with half of the eight rounds taking place overseas.

The changes have enticed two new teams to the grid: Xcel Motorsport will be joined by fellow British F4 squad Argenti Motorsport, which has formed an intriguing partnership with single-seater powerhouse Prema for its entry.

On the driver front, recent Silverstone Autosport BRDC Young Driver Award winner Deagen Fairclough (below) is a likely early favourite following his record-breaking British F4 performance last year. He could face internal competition within Hitech GP from Nikita Johnson, who won twice in his rookie GB3 campaign in 2024. Alex Ninovic, runner-up to Fairclough in F4, will be aiming to lock horns with his rival again by making the step up with Rodin Motorsport, and his team-mate Abbi Pulling will be hoping to shine after winning the F1 Academy crown last year. Rising star Freddie Slater will also be one to watch during his part-time campaign with Hillspeed.

STEVE WHITFIELD

JEP

GARY HAWKINS

28-29 JUNE

SUPER TOURING POWER 3

Judging by early indications, Super Touring Power 3 at Brands Hatch on 28-29 June has the potential to be the best edition yet. That is some going, considering how well the first two stagings of the tin-top extravaganza – celebrating the British Touring Car Championship's most fondly remembered era – were received.

After skipping last year's edition, the hugely popular Kiwi contingent will be back, with at least half a dozen cars being shipped from New Zealand (see News). The chance for Brands Hatch local Patrick Watts – a staunch supporter of the event – to get reacquainted with Paul McCarthy's unique 'rhubarb and custard' Mazda Xedos 6 that he raced in period will be a treat.

It's not just about the Super Tourers. The Classic Touring Car Racing Club's full suite of championships will also race on both the Indy and Grand Prix layouts, with the Group A element (below) growing in stature each year and now attracting Antipodean interest too.

Star drivers, high-speed demonstrations and off-track displays offer further opportunity to wallow in nostalgia. The event showcases the full history of touring cars, so expect to see anything from the likes of a Bill McGovern Hillman Imp to the musical glory of the late Alan Minshaw's BMW M3.

MARK PAULSON

BrandsHatch

GARY HAWKINS

5 JULY

EQUIPE 6 HOUR

Equipe Classic Racing has redefined the competition landscape for owners of pre-1966 GT and GTS cars over the past decade. Marketed as "premium clubman racing", its initial focus on the marques that engaged enthusiasts on road and track in a golden era has grown to nine grids. ECR's inaugural six-hour endurance race, "in the spirit of the Spa Six Hours of the early 2000s", at Donington Park on Saturday 5 July, should be sensational.

Following the model of the Belgian classic, inaugurated in 1993, the Equipe 6 Hour's USP is outlawing the Ford GT40s (the majority late-built, to FIA HTP specification) that have won 18 of the 31 Francorchamps races. Evocative as GT40s are, the model's dominance – they now comprise a quarter of the Spa field – has reduced its diversity and entry from 100-plus to around 80.

MICK WALKER

The first tranche of Donington entries sold out quickly and, capped at 40 cars, an extra batch is likely to be oversubscribed. The accessibility, location and popularity of the fast, flowing National circuit will see around 130 competitors head into battle. An hour of qualifying precedes the 1300-1900 race, with a big party afterwards. "We are not competing with Spa, but see our event as complementary," says ECR's John Pearson. What price a trophy for the top-placed crew over both?

MARCUS PYE

JEP

22-24 AUGUST

SILVERSTONE FESTIVAL

The Goodwood Revival and Silverstone Festival (formerly the Classic) are the first two events that go into this writer's diary each year. Both feature exotic historic machinery driven by top racers and showcase superb wheel-to-wheel contests. The Festival gets the nod here, partly because of its wider range of eras – which stretch all the way to sports-prototypes that have only just retired from contemporary competition – and also because 2025 is a special year for Silverstone.

To celebrate 75 years since the Formula 1 world championship kicked off in Northamptonshire, a special display of title-winning cars will be assembled. The aim is to have F1 cars raced by all 34 champions together for the first time. Given the success of last year's Ayrton Senna tribute (above), it'll be fascinating to see what will be part of the World Champions Collection.

The racing will, of course, provide much of the action. As part of the F1 75 celebrations, a 500cc F3 grid will be part of the event for the first time. The diminutive single-seaters provided the support act for the 1950 British Grand Prix and more than 60 are expected for the Sunday contest.

Beyond that, there is the usual array of single-seater, sportscar and touring car grids, including Masters Racing Legends for F1 cars of the 1966-85 period and the return of Group C. Whatever your tastes, there will be plenty to savour.
KEVIN TURNER

1-2 NOVEMBER

WALTER HAYES TROPHY

The Walter Hayes Trophy is always a special event. The sight of a horde of Formula Ford 1600 machines swarming into Brooklands squabbling for position is enough to warm the spirits on even the coldest of November days. Plenty of action and close racing is guaranteed, and there is very often a hint of controversy as well.

This year's edition, following just a week after the Brands Hatch Formula Ford Festival, is set to be extra special. The popular Silverstone event is reaching its 25th anniversary and you can be sure that its creator, James Beckett, will pull out all the stops to attract an impressive entry to celebrate the occasion in style.

Ex-Formula 1 driver and sportscar star Jan Magnussen was among the notable names to feature last year, when he took part in the pre-1982 Carl Hamer Trophy. And that is the great thing about the Hayes – as well as the contemporary FF1600s, the battling among the two separate contests for historic machinery is just as fierce. With the prospect of further intriguing entries gracing the National circuit, mixing it with the WHT regulars, those spectating will need to secure a spot early in the BRDC grandstand!

STEPHEN LICKORISH

JEP

ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY
MM 876
Cormack

PAUL LAWRENCE

20-24 NOVEMBER

ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY

The Roger Albert Clark Rally is still months away, yet the buzz is already building ahead of this remarkable event.

For five days, the forests of England, Scotland and Wales will host a huge field of rally cars and thousands of fans, reliving the glory days of the RAC Rallies of the 1970s and 1980s.

A unique atmosphere surrounds this epic biennial challenge and the 2025 edition promises to be even better than the last one. It is about BDGs in the forest, rallying in the dark, relentless days, fierce competition, challenging weather and great banter.

It's also about star names, star cars and true clubmen taking on the biggest rally in the UK. Can anything match the spectacle of Ford Escorts, Porsche 911s, Triumph TR7 V8s and the glorious Lancia Stratos doing battle in the forests? It's a true celebration of the era when Roger Clark was in his pomp.

The 180 available places will be in big demand and lots of overseas entries and some big names are sure to be part of it all.

It's an absolute stand-out fixture on this writer's calendar and is an event that celebrates everything that is good about British rallying. But it's more than just a rally: this is a five-day adventure!

PAUL LAWRENCE

V8 VIVA TAKES TO THE STAGES

The Vauxhall Viva HB was always more of a race car than a rally machine, but a special creation is now making quite an impression in club-level rallying

PAUL LAWRENCE

PHOTOGRAPHY **PAUL LAWRENCE, BEN LAWRENCE & SEAN JONES**

ack in the late 1960s, the Vauxhall Viva HB was best known for Gerry Marshall's success in Special Saloon racing, but the cars were never particularly renowned for rallying. Now, over five decades later, Sean Jones is bucking that trend with an intriguing self-built device and showed its potential with fifth place on the Showground Stages at Builth Wells in January.

Jones, a 26-year-old who lives at Burry Port, within sight of Pembrey circuit, has always had a passion for the unusual. He even competed in a Volvo 340 in his younger years. More recently, he's run a Vauxhall Astra, which was his uncle Phil's former autograss car converted back into a rally machine.

The Viva project is his most ambitious so far, although he's actually owned the car for 10 years. "Just before I turned 17, I bought an HB out of my first couple of weeks' wages as an apprentice," he relates. "My intention was to build my first Viva into a rally car." He ended up putting so much effort into it that it became too nice to rally, and now it just goes out to classic car shows.

> *"I eventually chucked it into the shed, and thought the most I would ever do would be to cut panels out of it"*

"Then I was told there was an HB sitting in a shed locally," Jones continues. "I thought I'd buy it as a spare-parts car just to finish off my other one. It was a shed of a Viva left out in the rain, but the guy wanted £800 for it. I didn't think it was worth that much. I told him I couldn't go more than £200. Three weeks later, he rang me and said, 'Would you still give me that £200?' So I rushed up to his house with a trailer as quick as I could."

Jones then neglected the Viva for about three years and left it sitting in the rain, just robbing the bits he needed for his other car. "It was an SL Viva, but it was an automatic, so it was a bit useless for me," he explains. "I eventually chucked it into the shed, and thought the most I would ever do would be to cut panels out of it."

It was on the Manx Rally in 2022 when he resolved that he wanted to rally a Viva rather than an Astra: "I thought I'd start the Viva project. I dragged it out of the shed, stripped it apart, put it on a rollover jig, and started mocking up some Mazda MX-5 and BMW suspension.

"It did look a bit tired, but the exterior wasn't super-rotten. It's not like an Escort where you can just buy panels. You can't buy a single panel for a Viva. You can't even get a sill."

It took two years of evenings and weekends to get it to the point where it was ready to rally. The initial plan was to use an ex-race Rover V8 engine. "It sounded pretty impressive but, on the rolling road, it broke a piston and put a rod through the side of the block," Jones recalls. "So that was the end of that."

Instead, he found a Rover Vitesse engine in a scrapyard for £200 and fitted his race cam and Range Rover heads to give it more compression. Its smoky progress at Builth Wells points to the fact that it needs some new piston rings. Jones has used a Sierra six-speed dog 'box and made his own gear linkage. "I haven't got much money, so everything I do ends up as cheap as possible and I engineer everything myself," he reveals.

Jones took the car out at Pembrey over Christmas for a first run and then went to Builth Wells and surprised everyone, including himself, by finishing fifth. "It's the best finish I've ever had on a rally," he smiles. "It's obviously got a lot of teething problems, and I need to put some tidy shocks on the front."

The next planned outing will be the Kath Curzon Memorial Rally at Pembrey at the end of March. But Jones's ambition is to contest a bigger event and the 2026 Manx Rally is the target.

"I'm not very good at fabrication – I get my dad and my uncle to do that because I'm definitely no fabricator, but I'm quite good at anything mechanical and machining all the other bits," concludes the British Aerospace engineer, who has created a remarkable, rare and competitive club-level rally car for under £10,000. And turned a few heads in the process.

Jones scored his best-ever result with fifth on recent Showground Stages event

The Viva has gone from out in the rain, to a shed corner – and now the stages

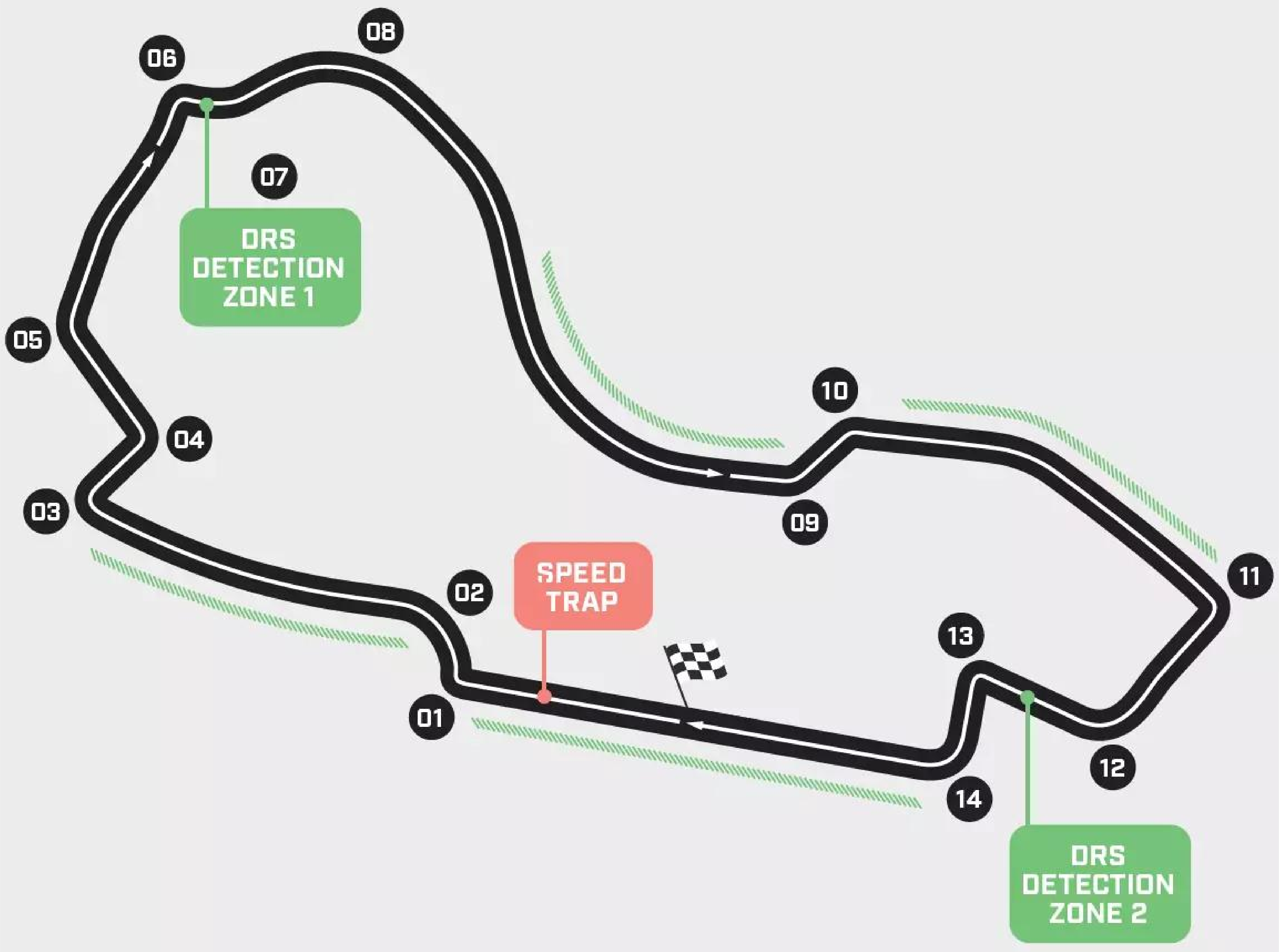
Jones enjoys the unusual and says more tweaks are to come on V8-powered Viva

Safari Rally
Will 2024 winner Kalle Rovanpera be standing tall again?

McKLEIN

AUSTRALIAN GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 1



CONFIDENCE IS A PREFERENCE FOR PARK LIFE

Modern Formula 1 hasn't felt quite right without Albert Park to offer the opening round of the championship. Now, thankfully, Melbourne's parkland venue kicks off 2025 with Bahrain's move back in the schedule due to Ramadan.

Although it's not considered as one of the best circuits for out-and-out racing, Albert Park features a number of pinch-points that can generate errors, and the changes made to the layout for 2022 and beyond in the interests of speeding it up have made the Lakeside Drive stretch a much more fearsome prospect. Getting through Turn 1 unscathed at the start is half the battle; since it joined the calendar 29 years ago, Melbourne has thrown up plenty of incidents through the 90-degree right-hander that render the journey to the other side of the world wasted – think Eddie Irvine's 1997 assault on Jacques Villeneuve, or the pile-up of 2002.

Turn 3 can be just as daunting and a breeding ground for sloppy passes. Turn 6 has been modified to cover off repeats of George Russell's 2024 shunt or Alex Albon's 2023 dice with the wall, but the circuit should still punish mistakes.

The best pre-Max result for a Verstappen in Melbourne was dad Jos's 10th in 2001

SUTTON/GETTYIMAGES

RACE DATA

Venue	Albert Park
First GP	1996
GPs held	27
Circuit length	3.280 miles
Number of laps	58
Race distance	190.216 miles
Race lap record	1m19.813s Charles Leclerc (2024)
Pole lap record	1m15.915s Max Verstappen (2024)
Most wins	Michael Schumacher 4
Most poles	Lewis Hamilton 8
Most starts	Fernando Alonso 19

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 14 March	
Practice 1	0130-0230
Practice 2	0500-0600
Saturday 15 March	
Practice 3	0130-0230
Qualifying	0500-0600
Sunday 16 March	
Race	0400

WHERE TO WATCH

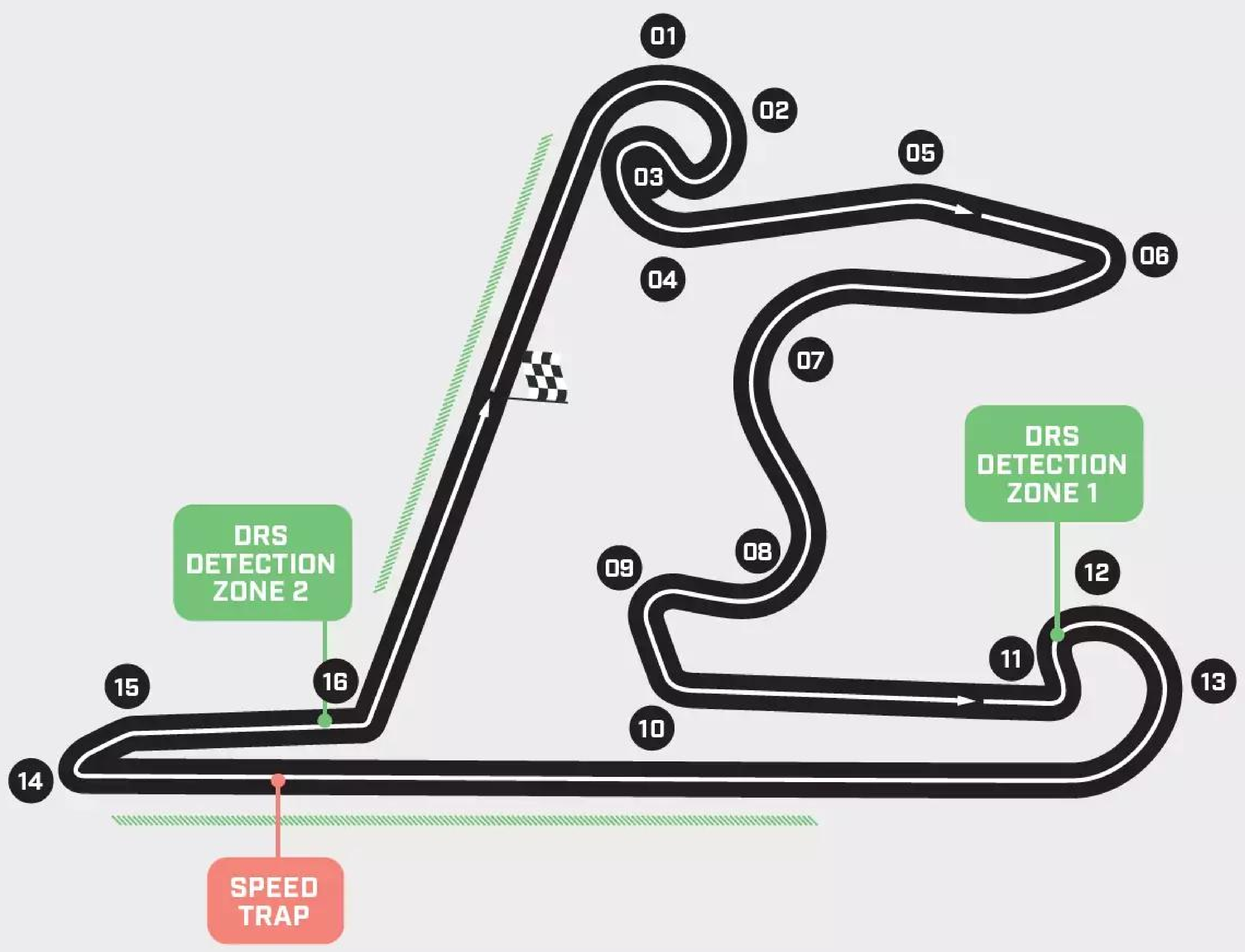
Live coverage	Sky Sports F1
Highlights	Channel 4

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	**Carlos Sainz**	Ferrari
2023	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2022	**Charles Leclerc**	Ferrari
2019	**Valtteri Bottas**	Mercedes
2018	**Sebastian Vettel**	Ferrari
2017	**Sebastian Vettel**	Ferrari
2016	**Nico Rosberg**	Mercedes
2015	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2014	**Nico Rosberg**	Mercedes
2013	**Kimi Raikkonen**	Lotus

CHINESE GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 2



SING SHANG-A-LANG AS THEY RUN WITH THE GANG

If you ever find yourself in the midst of a motorsport pub quiz, it would be useful to know that the Shanghai circuit was laid out in a vague approximation of the Chinese character 'shang'. It is a track that has consistently encountered mixed reviews since joining the F1 calendar in 2004, but Shanghai certainly offers a series of unique challenges through its layout and blend of long-radius corners and sharp stops at the end of longer straights.

Perhaps the most famous corner is the first, an endless right-hander that progressively tightens up until it forces drivers to switch left, famously the scene of Daniil Kvyat's 'torpedo' antics on Sebastian Vettel during the 2016 race. Although the most obvious overtaking point sits at Turn 14, the culmination of the long 1200m back stretch, drivers can also attempt to make a move at Turn 6 – the site of Daniel Ricciardo's "lick the stamp and send it" pass on Valtteri Bottas for victory in 2018.

It's one of those circuits that gets better with changeable conditions to break it out of a guaranteed one-stopper; without them, expect DRS passes galore and deleted lap times as drivers skirt the limits at Turn 16…

FP1 for the first Chinese GP was topped by… the BAR of Anthony Davidson

SUTTON/GETTY IMAGES

RACE DATA

Venue	Shanghai
First GP	2004
GPs held	17
Circuit length	3.387 miles
Number of laps	56
Race distance	189.677 miles
Race lap record	1m32.238s Michael Schumacher (2004)
Pole lap record	1m31.095s Sebastian Vettel (2018)
Most wins	Lewis Hamilton 6
Most poles	Lewis Hamilton 6
Most starts	Fernando Alonso 16

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 21 March

Practice 1	0330-0430
Sprint qualifying	0730-0814

Saturday 22 March

Sprint	0300
Qualifying	0700-0800

Sunday 23 March

Race	0700

WHERE TO WATCH

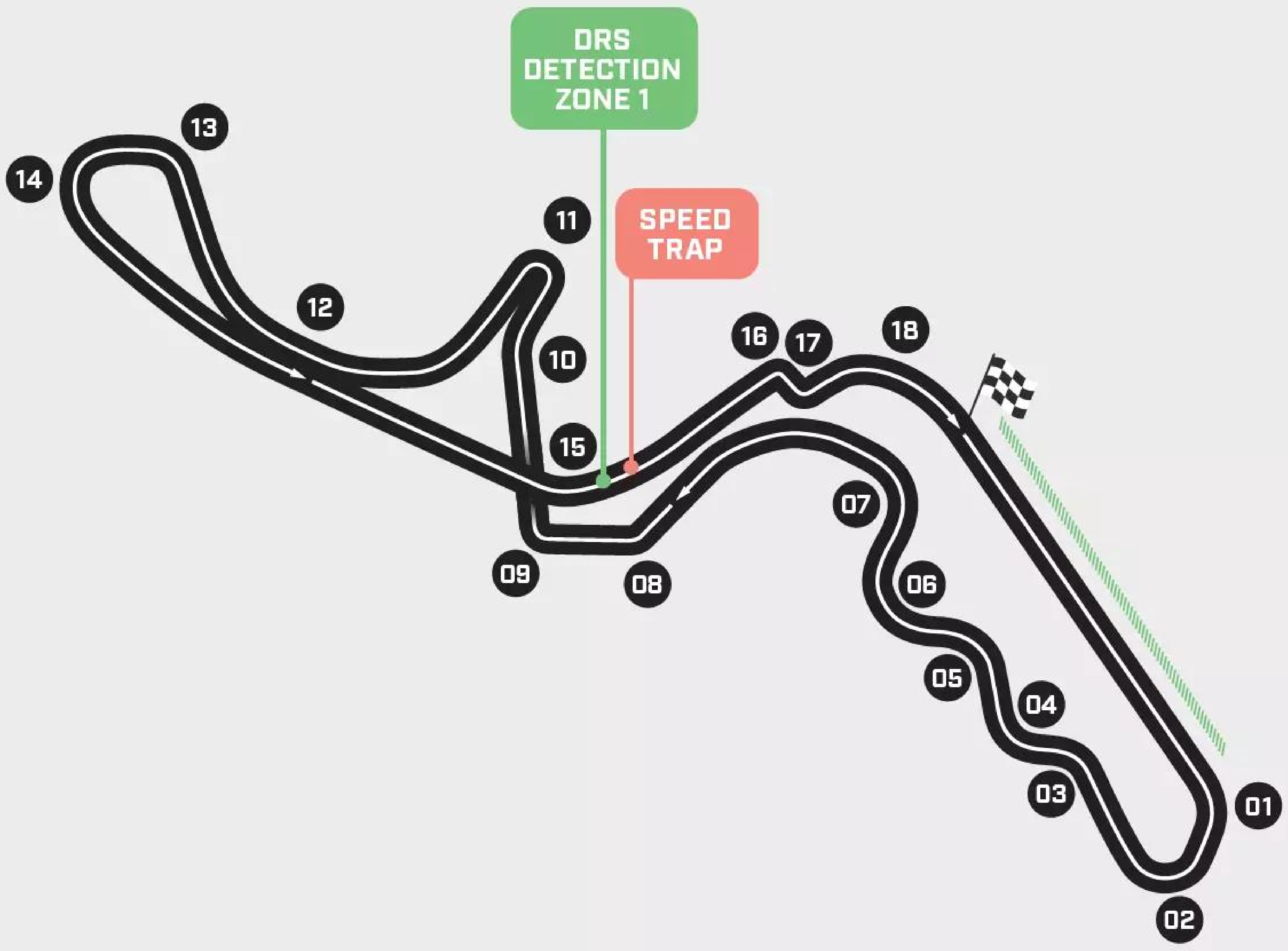
Live coverage	Sky Sports F1
Highlights	Channel 4

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2019	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2018	**Daniel Ricciardo**	Red Bull
2017	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2016	**Nico Rosberg**	Mercedes
2015	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2014	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2013	**Fernando Alonso**	Ferrari
2012	**Nico Rosberg**	Mercedes
2011	**Lewis Hamilton**	McLaren

JAPANESE GP

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 3



FROM VISIONS OF CHINA TO JAPAN

This is a favourite of the drivers, and it's no surprise why: the F1 calendar's sole figure-of-eight venue is considered one of the most technical tracks in the world.

The Senna S corners are relentless, the Degner Curves and hairpin demand bravery on the brakes, and Spoon Curve is one of the most difficult to nail correctly without losing too much time. 130R might be easy flat these days, but any slight mis-step can result in a colossal trip to the barriers – just ask Super Formula driver Ukyo Sasahara.

Suzuka was moved to April last year, in line with F1's desire to start putting races together based on location and just in time for cherry blossom season; unfortunately, the race failed to bloom because at that point the championship was still relatively uncontested. And, although the circuit itself is wonderful – complete with fervent home support and the drivers' unconditional love for it – the spectacle can be a struggle in one-way championship seasons.

But, if the 2025 season looks open after the first two rounds, then expect something magical. A repeat of 2005, and Kimi Raikkonen's swashbuckling drive from 17th on the grid, would be very much welcome.

LEYTON HOUSE
16

Who remembers Ivan Capelli's March leading briefly in the 1988 race?

GETTYIMAGES

RACE DATA

Venue	Suzuka
First GP	1987
GPs held	34
Circuit length	3.608 miles
Number of laps	53
Race distance	191.240 miles
Race lap record	1m30.983s Lewis Hamilton (2019)
Pole lap record	1m27.064s Sebastian Vettel (2019)
Most wins	Michael Schumacher 6
Most poles	Michael Schumacher 8
Most starts	Michael Schumacher 19

TIMETABLE (UK TIME)

Friday 4 April	
Practice 1	0330-0430
Practice 2	0700-0800
Saturday 5 April	
Practice 3	0330-0430
Qualifying	0700-0800
Sunday 6 April	
Race	0600

WHERE TO WATCH

Live coverage	Sky Sports F1
Highlights	Channel 4

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2024	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2023	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2022	**Max Verstappen**	Red Bull
2019	**Valtteri Bottas**	Mercedes
2018	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2017	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2016	**Nico Rosberg**	Mercedes
2015	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2014	**Lewis Hamilton**	Mercedes
2013	**Sebastian Vettel**	Red Bull

IMSA SPORTSCAR

Round 2/11
Sebring 12 Hours, USA
15 March

The second instalment of what is colloquially known as the '36 Hours of Florida' – comprising IMSA's two classic season-openers – takes place several weeks after the first. But some of the crews will have squeezed in the World Endurance Championship kickoff in Qatar since the Daytona 24 Hours.

Among them is Laurens Vanthoor, who finds himself atop the IMSA points table with Nick Tandy and Felipe Nasr after they guided their Porsche 963 to victory at Daytona. Acura was the winning marque at Sebring last year, but the Wayne Taylor Racing squad that ran the car – along with much of its driver line-up – is now part of the Cadillac fold.

Sebring oozes sportscar history. The first 12 Hours was held in 1952 and it quickly became a Mecca for sportscar and road-racing aficionados, with the layout an intriguing mix of purpose-built track that heads onto the wide-open runways of the neighbouring airport.

LEVITT/GETTY IMAGES

DUTCH PHOTO AGENCY/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

FORMULA 2

Round 1/14
Melbourne, Australia
15-16 March

The recent plundering of Formula 2 talent by the grand prix teams indicates that at last they've realised it's better to put youngsters in their cars than someone who has a hundred eighth-place finishes on their CV, so hopefully there'll be plenty of attention on the class of 2025.

The nature of the Melbourne circuit is such that plenty of Dallara spare parts will likely be required, especially with the Formula 3 sister series also kicking off its season, so results might not be representative of the trend for the year. Nevertheless, last year's feature race winner was pretty handy – Isack Hadjar went on to take second in the points, and an RB F1 seat.

JEP

DONINGTON PARK BRSCC

British GT, Ginettas (GT, Academy, Junior), GB4
5-6 April

British GT has broken with recent tradition this year – it isn't beginning at Oulton Park or on Easter weekend. Instead, the new sportscar season gets under way at Donington Park where the wide spaces of the Leicestershire circuit are reckoned to be more suitable for the opener. Further GT racing will be provided by Ginetta's trio of series. The introduction of a new car has sparked a surge of interest in GB4, and among those on the grid will be the next generation of Coulthard and Magnussen racers.

FORMULA 3

Round 1/10
Melbourne, Australia
15-16 March

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Round 2/13
Melbourne, Australia
13-16 March

NASCAR CUP SERIES

Round 5/36
Las Vegas, USA
16 March

Round 6/36
Homestead, USA
23 March

Round 7/36
Martinsville, USA
30 March

Round 8/36
Darlington, USA
6 April

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 3/14
Safari Rally Kenya
Naivasha, Kenya
20-23 March

INDYCAR SERIES

Round 2/16
Thermal Club, USA
23 March

F1 ACADEMY

Round 1/7
Shanghai, China
22-23 March

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

Round 1/6
Barcelona, Spain
6 April

SILVERSTONE BRSCC

C1 Endurance, SuperSport Endurance, Pro Sports Sprint, Audi TTs, Mazdas (MX-5, SuperCup, Clubman)
15-16 March

Thermal Club first hosted IndyCar with non-points event in 2024

TONS/GETTY IMAGES

SNETTERTON MSVR

EnduroKa, Miata Trophy, Trackday (Championship, Trophy), Allcomers
15-16 March

DONINGTON PARK BARC

TCR UK, Civic Cup, CTCRC (Pre-'66, Pre-'83, Pre-'93, Pre-'03), Junior Saloons, Caterham Graduates, MGOC
22-23 March

KIRKISTOWN 500MRCI

FF1600, Fiestas, Mini Coopers, Libre Saloons, MX-5s
29 March

BRANDS HATCH MSVR

Equipe Classic Racing
29-30 March

DONINGTON PARK MSVR

GT Cup, Radical Cup UK, Legends, 7 Racing, Focus Cup
29-30 March

SILVERSTONE VSCC

Vintage and historic cars
5 April

SILVERSTONE BARC

Britcar, Monoposto, 2CVs, Superkarts
5 April

SNETTERTON BRSCC

Fiestas (ST240, ST150, Junior), CityCar Cup, BMWs (Compact, 1 Series), Modified Fords, Mini Miglia, Mini Se7en, Snetterton Saloons, CMMC Super Saloons/Tin Tops
5-6 April

BRANDS HATCH 750MC

116 Sprint/120 Coupe, 116 Trophy, MX-5 Cup, 750 Formula, BMW CC, Classic Stock Hatch, MR2s, Radicals, Sport Specials, Type R Trophy
5-6 April

KNOCKHILL KMSC

Legends, Modsports, Minis, C1s, Fiesta STs, Classic Sports Saloons, Northern Saloons/Sports
5-6 April

MONDELLO PARK MPSC

Boss Ireland, SEAT Supercup, Strykers, Fiestas (STs, Zetecs), Legends, Junior Mini, ITCC, Future Classics, Historics, Karts
5-6 April

SILVERSTONE MSVR

United FF1600, Clio Cup GB, Miata Trophy, Trackday (Trophy, Championship)
6 April

AUTOSPORT
F1
AND MOTORSPORT

DUNBAR; JEP; STEVE JONES; GETTY IMAGES

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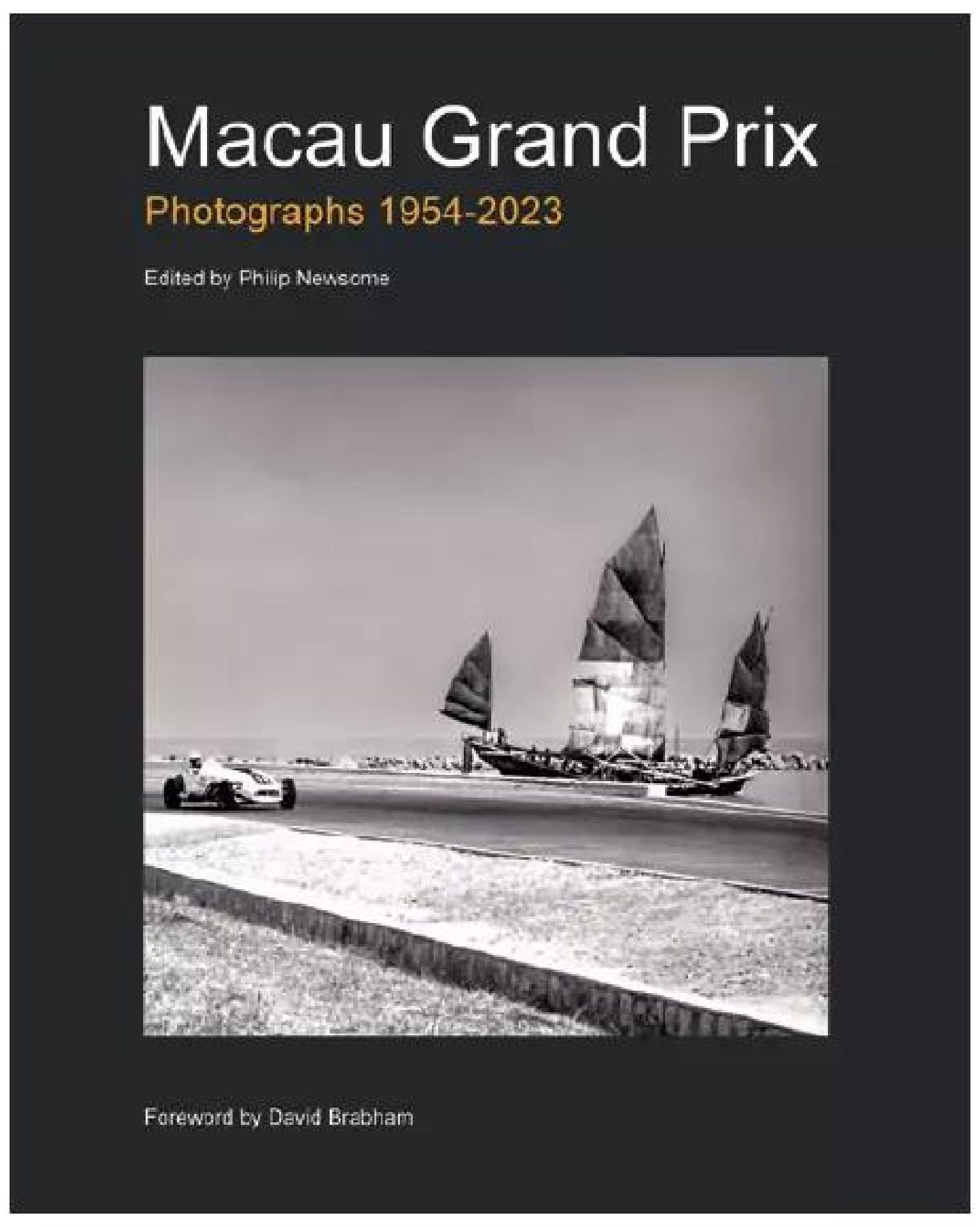


Macau Grand Prix
Photographs 1954-2023
Edited by Philip Newsome

Foreword by David Brabham

MACAU GRAND PRIX PHOTOGRAPHS 1954-2023

blueflagpress.co.uk
RRP £75

As the foremost historian of the Macau Grand Prix, Philip Newsome has already produced tomes about this revered race. This offering from the amiable, formerly Hong Kong-based dentistry professor is, instead, largely pictorial.

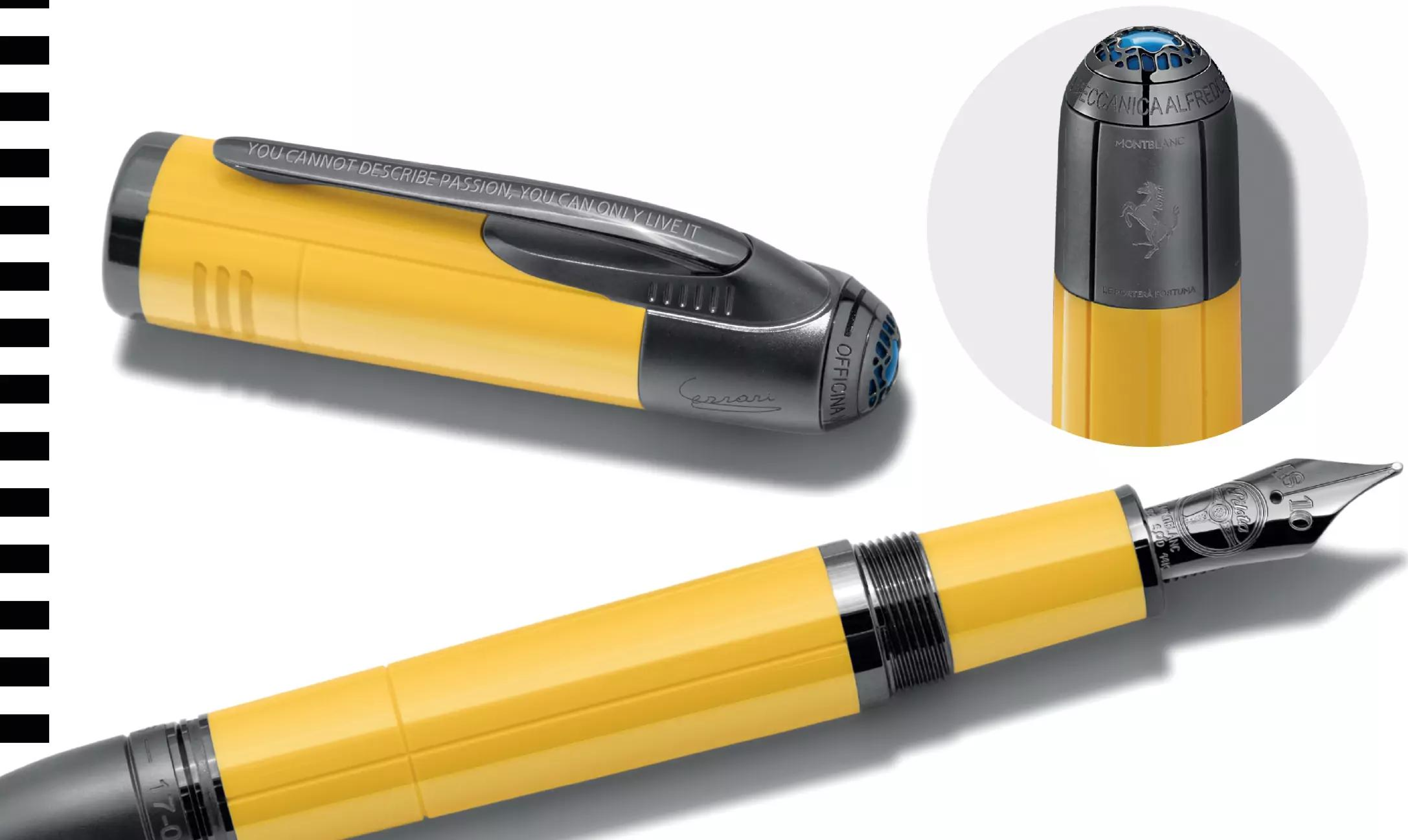
That said, Newsome can't avoid giving a potted history of the event in his captioning of the photography, which is spectacular. From latter decades, it's largely his own

GREAT CHARACTERS ENZO FERRARI SPECIAL EDITION GIALLO MODENA

montblanc.com
RRP £820-£1030

You stand a fair chance of running low on ink just writing the full title of this new pen from Mont Blanc. As the name suggests, Giallo Modena is a yellow hue associated with the town of Enzo Ferrari's birth, and the backdrop to the car company's Prancing Horse logo. Indeed, the pen celebrates the story of how Ferrari came by this symbol. It was originally the personal emblem of First World War flying ace Francesco Baracca, whose mother is said to have suggested to Enzo Ferrari that his racing cars carry it too. The countess's words *Le portera fortuna* ("It will bring you luck") are engraved alongside the Cavallino Rampante on the pen's cap.

The dates of Ferrari's birth and first race victory are engraved on the cone, and his signature is engraved on the cap top alongside *Officina Meccanica Alfredo Ferrari* – his father's workshop, where Enzo was born. Look closely and you'll see the phrase 'You cannot describe passion, you can only live it' engraved on the ruthenium-coated clip. Should you eschew the less expensive ballpoint options in favour of the traditional fountain pen, the gold nib is engraved with the outline of a 250 GTO steering wheel.



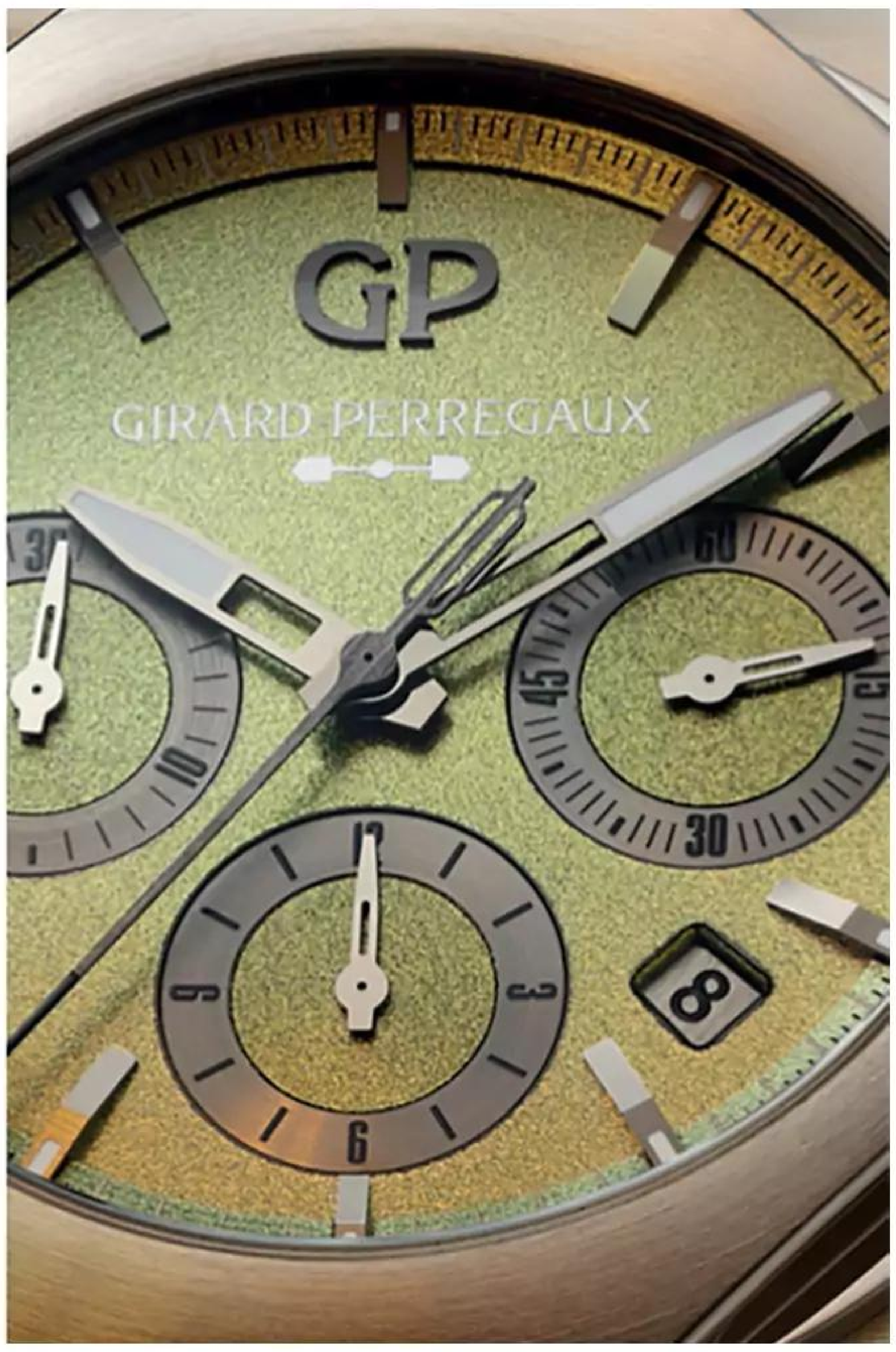
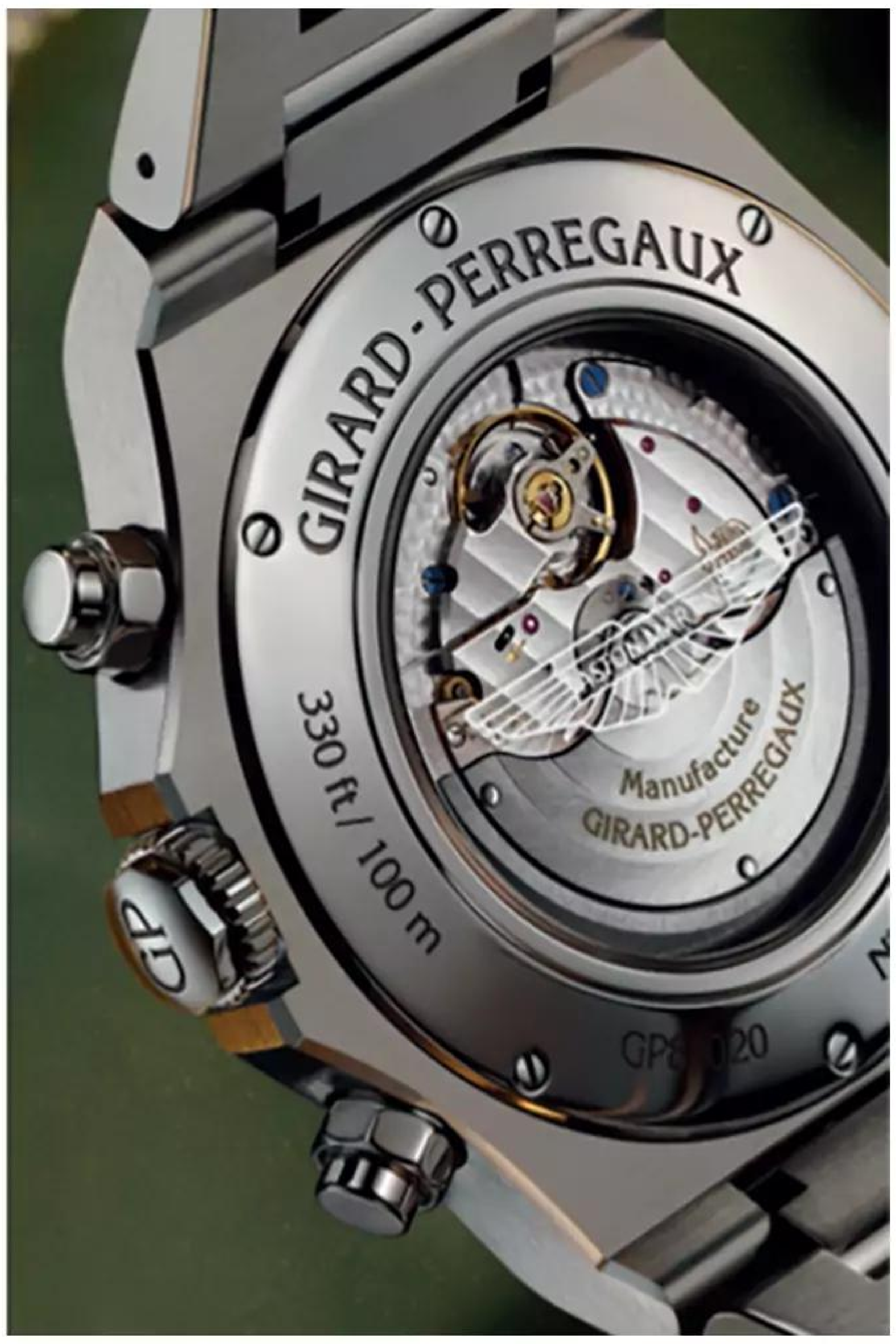
beautifully lit, evocative work; from older times, his archive acquisition offers not only fascinating imagery of a special race, but also a social documentary of Macau. Visuals from the 1950s and 1960s, when the background was fishing junks in the harbour and green hillsides rather than the current neon-lit cityscape, never fail to amaze.

The book is all the better for Newsome giving equal billing to all years rather than simply Macau's 1983-2018 F3 heyday. Yes, Senna and quite a few Schumachers are in there, but equally enjoyable are the early sportscar and pre-F3 Formula Atlantic years. A beautiful book on a remarkable race.

2014

Looking back, the big story of 2014 was the solitary appearance in Macau of future Formula One superstar Max Verstappen, driving for Dutch F3 outfit Van Amersfoort. Even at the tender age of 17 he was already showing signs of the flamboyant driving style which would lead to multiple World Championships. In Macau he finished in 7th place after starting 24th on the grid, setting the fastest lap of the race and overtaking seventeen drivers in the process.

213

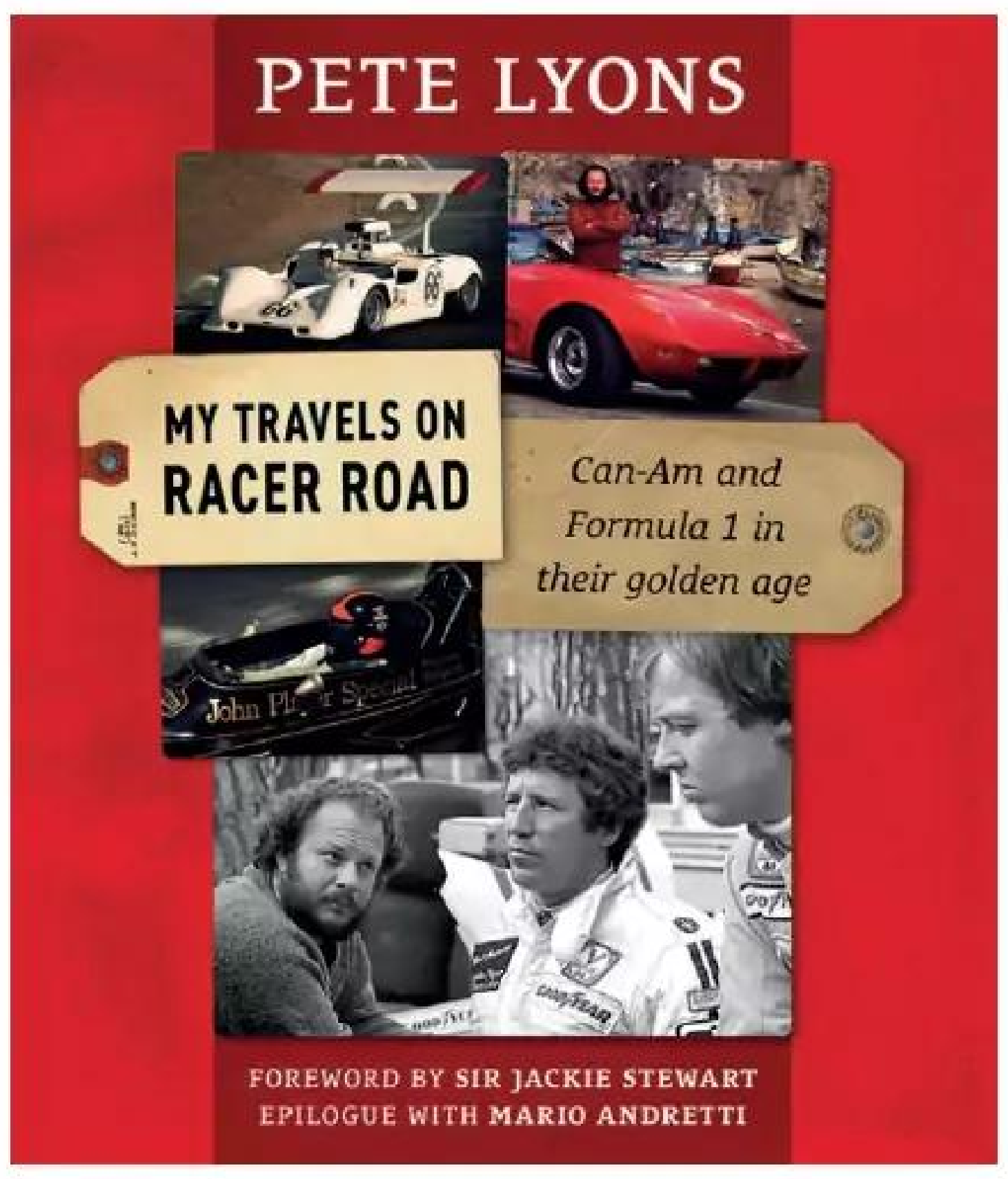
GIRARD-PERREGAUX LAUREATO CHRONOGRAPH ASTON MARTIN EDITION

girard-perregaux.com
RRP £18,200

Swiss artisan timepiece maker Girard-Perregaux is Aston Martin's official watch partner and its last limited edition Laureato model celebrating the partnership – numbering just 188 examples – sold out. This latest watch offers a fascinatingly intricate take on Aston's traditional green colour: the dial surface carries 15 ultra-thin layers of paint and has been subjected to two 'cooking' cycles, giving an iridescent effect: viewed from different angles the face transitions from green to orange. The marque's hypercar, the Valkyrie, is also available in this hue.

The original Laureato models from 1975 led the trend for steel-bracelet watches. Appropriately for a partnership with a performance brand, the Aston Martin Edition is crafted from Grade 5 titanium. Skeletonised hands visually echo a road car's grille, and the face features three snailed counters: 30-minute and 12-hour chronograph registers along with a small seconds display. The hands and indices are lined with luminescent material that appears white in normal light, green in dark conditions.

A sapphire caseback featuring the Aston Martin logo offers a window on the workings of the in-house GP033300 calibre movement, a self-winding mechanism featuring an oscillating weight bearing circular Cotes de Geneve motifs. The case itself is certified water-resistant to 100m.



PETE LYONS

MY TRAVELS ON RACER ROAD

Can-Am and Formula 1 in their golden age

FOREWORD BY SIR JACKIE STEWART
EPILOGUE WITH MARIO ANDRETTI

MY TRAVELS ON RACER ROAD

evropublishing.com
RRP £70

Long-time Autosport readers will be familiar with author Pete Lyons, son of Ozzie, this organ's USA correspondent in the early days. Pete fell in love with racing via his father's work and Eurocentric magazines – very little TV coverage of motorsport in those days – and fell into an itinerant life as a photojournalist.

This happily coincided with the golden age of Can-Am and, from 1966-72, Pete covered around 40,000 miles per year in or on vehicles as diverse as a Volvo estate, a Ford van and a Honda CB750 motorbike. Just as the appeal of camping in all weathers began to wear thin, he was offered global F1 gigs by Autosport and *Autoweek*. This fascinating memoir has all of this and more – such as rallying with Denny Hulme…

GOODYEAR
CHAMPION
FORD

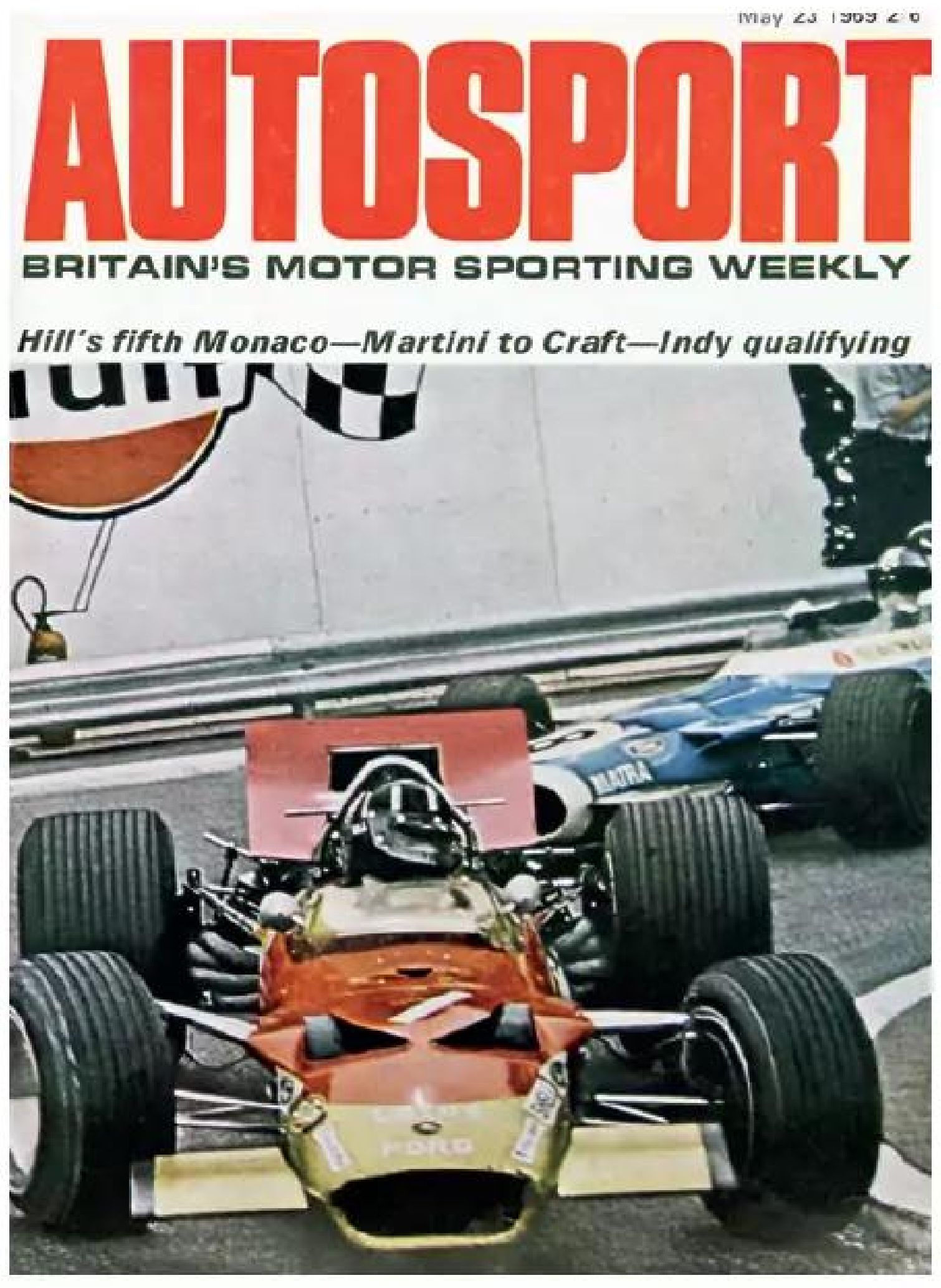
Peterson's calm in the storm

Autosport's report on the 1974 British Grand Prix made much of the ferocious spectacle of practice, rendered "shockingly visible" by the very particular topography of the Brands Hatch circuit. But "amidst all the violence", related Pete Lyons, "Ronnie Peterson's JPS was slicing across the road at the same startling angles, his hands were flashing across the top of the wheel as dramatically, his engine was blaring as determinedly as all the rest – but somehow he didn't look as busy. There was a sensation of grace about every movement that made the quickest action almost languid. Nothing he did looked (or sounded) surprised." In the final session, the total confidence of this "driver in the mould of legends" in "whipping out a quick one at the very last minute" didn't entirely play to his advantage – a crowd-pleasing 1m19.7s effort was indeed good enough to put his Lotus in pole position, but that place went instead to Niki Lauda, who had earlier recorded the exact same time in his Ferrari.

Photographer Rainer Schlegelmilch/ Getty Images

Where Brands Hatch, UK
When Saturday 20 July 1974

Ronnie Peterson
John Player Special
1
JPS
GOOD YEAR
VICKS



May 23 1969 2/6

AUTOSPORT

BRITAIN'S MOTOR SPORTING WEEKLY

Hill's fifth Monaco—Martini to Craft—Indy qualifying

SHELL
Ford
GOLD LEAF
TEAM LOTUS
1
Gulf

Hill's Lotus 49B sported a rather less lofty aero device

GETTY IMAGES

Hill sets record as high-flying F1 changes forever

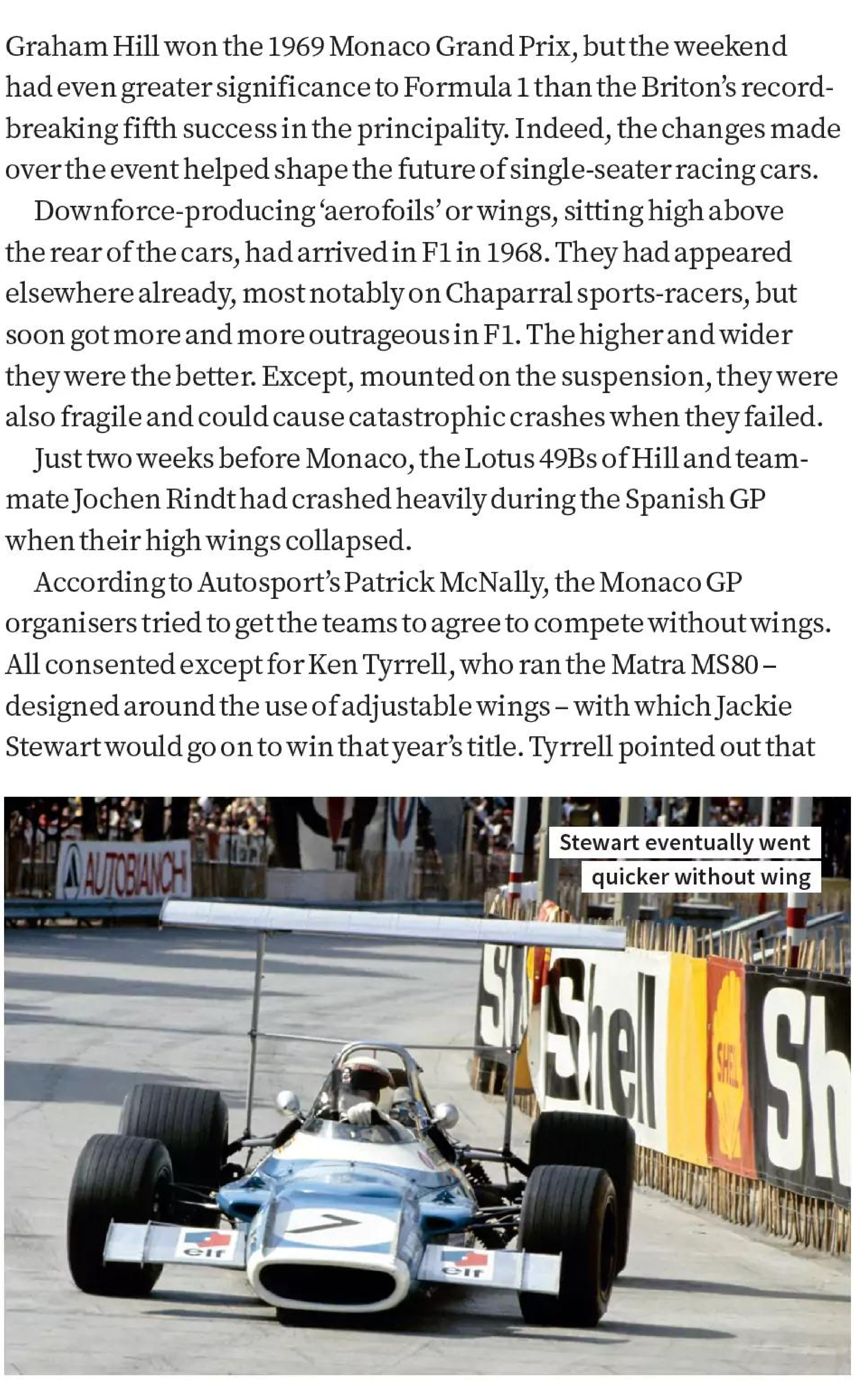
23 May 1969

Graham Hill won the 1969 Monaco Grand Prix, but the weekend had even greater significance to Formula 1 than the Briton's record-breaking fifth success in the principality. Indeed, the changes made over the event helped shape the future of single-seater racing cars.

Downforce-producing 'aerofoils' or wings, sitting high above the rear of the cars, had arrived in F1 in 1968. They had appeared elsewhere already, most notably on Chaparral sports-racers, but soon got more and more outrageous in F1. The higher and wider they were the better. Except, mounted on the suspension, they were also fragile and could cause catastrophic crashes when they failed.

Just two weeks before Monaco, the Lotus 49Bs of Hill and team-mate Jochen Rindt had crashed heavily during the Spanish GP when their high wings collapsed.

According to Autosport's Patrick McNally, the Monaco GP organisers tried to get the teams to agree to compete without wings. All consented except for Ken Tyrrell, who ran the Matra MS80 – designed around the use of adjustable wings – with which Jackie Stewart would go on to win that year's title. Tyrrell pointed out that the Automobile Club de Monaco was not in a position to enforce the decision given the regulations. Members of governing body CSI, forerunner of the FIA, therefore met on Thursday evening and voted to make the change on safety grounds, which meant it could be enacted immediately. Autosport believed that, had Lotus boss Colin Chapman been there to support Tyrrell, "the situation might have been very different", but the result was that the cars appeared with no wings, or much lower and smaller efforts, the following day.



Stewart eventually went quicker without wing

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Times were not that much slower. Stewart had set the pace on a 1m24.9s with wings. With Thursday times null and void, he managed 1m25.6s in the first qualifying session and ended up taking pole with a 1m24.6s.

"The forebodings of some that cars with their suspension set up to allow for wings would be dangerously unstable without them proved happily unjustified," reported Autosport.

Come the race, Stewart led comfortably before his driveshaft failed. Chris Amon's Ferrari and the second Matra of Jean-Pierre Beltoise had already retired, leaving Hill to dominate.

In that same issue of Autosport – 23 May 1969 – a letter from Rindt on the subject of wings was printed. The future (posthumous) world champion was not a fan and, aside from pointing out that "wings have nothing to do with a motor car", said: "The wing obviously works via the airflow over it, and this situation changes rapidly if you happen to follow another competitor; he has the full use of wings and you yourself have to put up with the turbulence created by his car. This could mean that the man in front is going slower than you, but you cannot pass because, after getting near to him, your wings stop working and you cannot go so quickly. This fact spoils racing to quite a large extent."

Is this the first instance of an F1 frontrunner talking about dirty air? It's a subject that has increasingly come to dominate single-seater racing and led to such things as DRS and the current ground-effect F1 regulations.

From 1969, wings had to be attached to the bodywork, had height restrictions, and moveable aerodynamic devices – which are set to return in 2026 – were banned. Autosport said the decision over the Monaco weekend was an example of the governing body doing "the right thing in the wrong way and at the wrong time". But, of course, it was not the end of wings. They got lower and more safely mounted but the designers and engineers knew they were onto something. Wings were here to stay; they just no longer flew quite so high.

KEVIN TURNER

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Saturday 24 May
Donington Park

Saturday 21 June
Cadwell Park

Saturday 30 August
Mallory Park

2025 SPEED CALENDAR

Sunday 4 May
Curborough Speed Trials

Sunday 11 May
Wiscombe Park Hill Climb

Saturday 7 June
Harewood Hill Climb

Sunday 6 July
Shelsley Walsh Hill Climb

Saturday 2 & Sunday 3 August
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Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 September
Loton Park Hill Climb

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